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DECEMBER 2007 NO. 89

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a crown
roast of pork**

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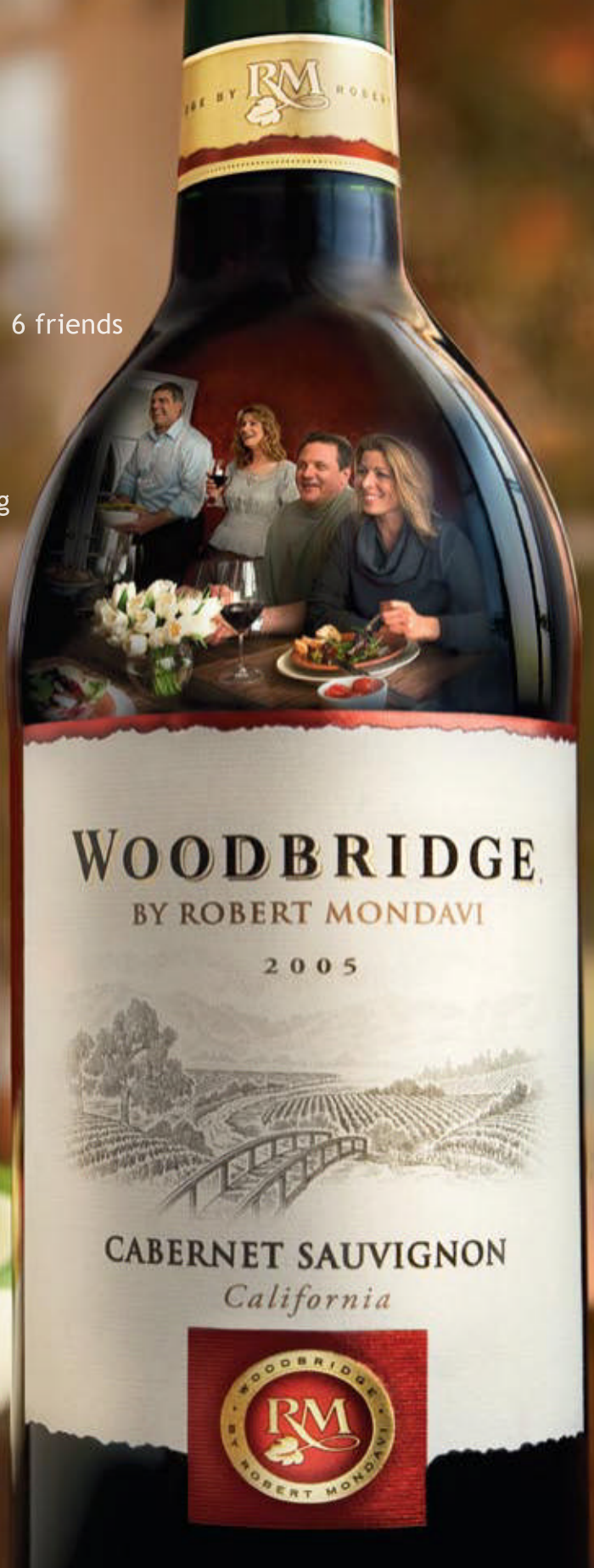
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DECEMBER 2007 ISSUE 89



44



46

BONUS FOLDOUT

30a Breakfast Basics

How to make the best eggs, pancakes, muffins & granola



Light, Crisp Waffles

ON THE COVER

102a Quick & Delicious

Quick prep, easy roast



Fennel & Rosemary Beef Tenderloin with Creamy Mustard Sauce



20



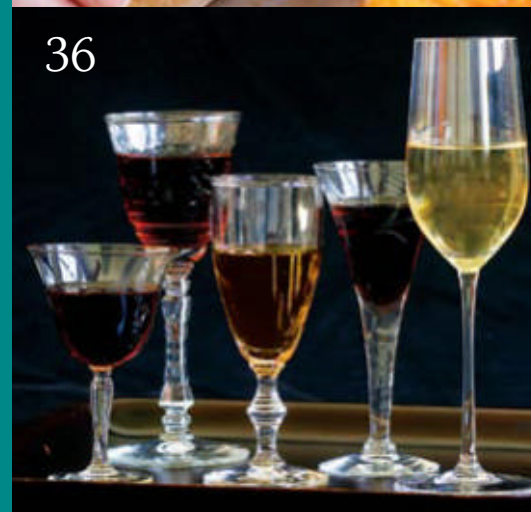
28

UP FRONT

- 6 Index
- 8 Menus
- 10 Letters
- 14 Contributors
- 16 Links
- 18 Artisan Foods
Miette Confiserie
- 20 Great Finds
Stocking stuffers for cooks
- 22 In Season
Leeks
- 26 Ask the Expert
Serving cheese
- 28 Equipment
 - ❖ Pizza cutter
 - ❖ Stand mixer
 - ❖ Baking peel
 - ❖ Silicone pan update
- 36 Enjoying Wine
Sherry
- 40 Readers' Tips



40

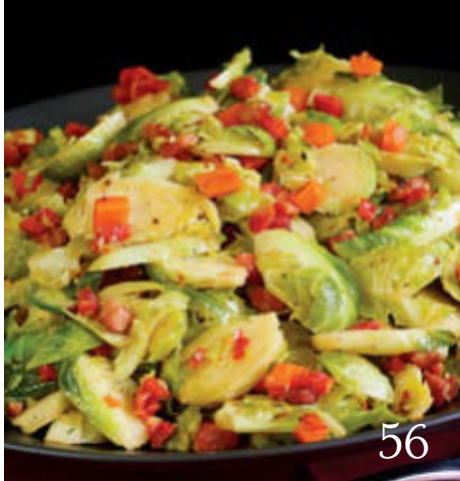


36



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56



60



66



70

FEATURES

- 44 Surprise Your Guests with Homemade Crackers**
An easy dough makes baking these crackers a breeze
by Lynne Sampson
- 46 Roasts to Boast About**
For a special holiday dinner, learn how to stuff, cook, and sauce an impressive pork or beef roast
by Allison Ehri Kreidler
- 52 Crispy Potato Pancakes**
A chef shares her tricks for making this classic holiday side—and a few great ways to jazz it up
by Arlene Jacobs
- 56 Sprouting Up**
Bring out the fresh, nutty flavor of Brussels sprouts by roasting, braising, or sautéing
by Martha Holmberg
- 60 Move Over, Gingerbread Man**
Spice up the season with four amazing desserts inspired by the most familiar of holiday flavors
by Julia M. Usher
- 66 WEEKNIGHT COOKING**
Thai on the Fly:
A Quick Curry for Any Night
A simple method gives you a repertoire of comforting, aromatic dishes
by Nancie McDermott
- 70 A Cookie for Every Occasion**
Baker Abby Dodge shares her seven favorite cookies for the holiday
Text by Lisa Waddle;
Recipes by Abigail Johnson Dodge



78



86



80



84

IN THE BACK

- 78 From Our Test Kitchen**
❖ Molasses
❖ Nonstick baking liners
❖ Cooking with bourbon
❖ Homemade curry paste
❖ Royal icing
- 86 Food Science**
Cocoa vs. chocolate
- 90 Where To Buy It**
- 92 2007 Index**
- 102 Nutrition Information**





75 Macadamia Double-Decker Brownie Bars



50 Beef Tenderloin with Wild Mushroom Stuffing & Port Wine Sauce

recipes

- ◆ QUICK
Under 45 minutes
- ◆ MAKE AHEAD
Can be completely prepared ahead but may need reheating and a garnish to serve
- ◆ MOSTLY MAKE AHEAD
Can be partially prepared ahead but will need a few finishing touches before serving
- ◆ VEGETARIAN
May contain eggs and dairy ingredients



57 Roasted Brussels Sprouts with Dijon, Walnuts & Crisp Crumbs

Cover Recipe

Fennel & Rosemary Beef Tenderloin with Creamy Mustard Sauce, 102a

Appetizers

- ◆ Leek Tart with Bacon & Gruyère, 23
- ◆ Seeded Crackers, 45

Beverages

- ◆ Classic Hot Cocoa, 88
- ◆ Rich Hot Chocolate, 88

Light Main Dishes

- ◆ Classic Potato Pancakes (Latkes), 53
- ◆ Leek Tart with Bacon & Gruyère, 23
- ◆ Potato Pancakes Stuffed with Duxelles, 54
- ◆ Sweet Potato & Chile Hash with a Fried Egg, 30a

Turkey & Chicken

- ◆ Green Curry with Chicken & Eggplant, 69
- Roasted Chicken Legs with Lemon & Green Olives, 102a

Beef, Pork & Lamb

- Beef Tenderloin with Wild Mushroom Stuffing & Port Wine Sauce, 50
- Crown Roast of Pork with Fennel-Apple Stuffing & Cider-Bourbon Sauce, 48
- Fennel & Rosemary Beef Tenderloin with Creamy Mustard Sauce, 102a

- ◆ Rack of Lamb with Ancho-Honey Glaze, 102a
- ◆ Red Country-Style Curry with Beef, Shiitakes & Edamame, 67
- Roasted Sausages & Grapes, 102a
- Spice-Crusted Roast Pork Tenderloin, 102a

Seafood

- ◆ Orange-Roasted Salmon with Yogurt-Caper Sauce, 102a
- ◆ Red Curry with Shrimp & Sugar Snap Peas, 68
- ◆ Roasted Cod with Lemon-Parsley Crumbs, 102a

Side Dishes

- Arroz Verde (Green Rice), 10
- ◆ Brussels Sprouts Braised with Pancetta, Shallot, Thyme & Lemon, 59
- ◆ Classic Potato Pancakes (Latkes), 53
- ◆ Potato Pancakes Stuffed with Duxelles, 54
- ◆ Roasted Brussels Sprouts with Dijon, Walnuts & Crisp Crumbs, 57
- ◆ Sautéed Shredded Brussels Sprouts with Fresh Herbs & Crisp Shallots, 58

Condiments, Sauces & Stuffings

- ◆ Duxelles, 54
- ◆ Eggnog Crème Anglaise, 63
- ◆ Green Curry Paste, 83
- ◆ Red Curry Paste, 83

Desserts

- ◆ Ginger-Spice Ice Cream, 64
- ◆ Ginger-Molasses Cheesecake, 65
- ◆ Gingerbread-Pear Cobbler, 61
- ◆ Steamed Coriander-Gingerbread Cake with Eggnog Crème Anglaise, 62

Cookies & Icings

- ◆ Bourbon Balls, 80
- ◆ Cardamom-Honey Cutouts, 72
- ◆ Dark Chocolate Crackles, 71
- ◆ Ginger-Spiced Slice & Bake Cookies, 74
- ◆ Macadamia Double-Decker Brownie Bars, 75
- ◆ Maple-Walnut Tuiles, 76
- ◆ Peanut Butter & Chocolate Sandwiches, 77
- ◆ Royal Icing, 85
- ◆ Rugelach, 73
- ◆ Vanilla Slice & Bake Cookies, 74

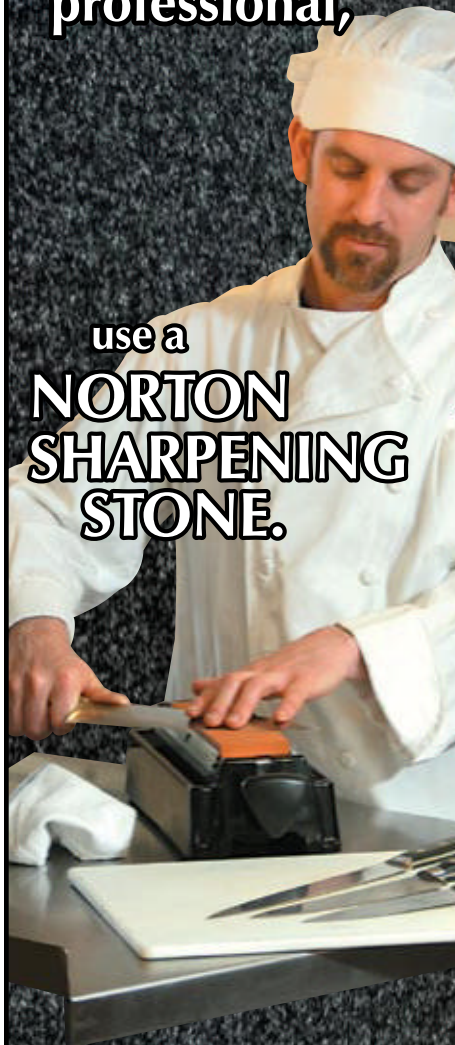
Breakfast

- ◆ Basic Buttermilk Pancakes, 30a
- ◆ Blueberry Muffins, 30a
- ◆ Classic Hot Cocoa, 88
- ◆ Crispy Sweet Pecan Granola, 30a
- ◆ Honey-Almond Granola, 30a
- ◆ Light, Crisp Waffles, 30a
- ◆ Rich Hot Chocolate, 88
- ◆ Sweet Potato & Chile Hash with a Fried Egg, 30a

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Help for the holidays

While most people look forward to this time of year, for cooks there's an added anticipation to the holidays. It comes from the chance to immerse yourself in the kitchen, making traditional dishes while also showing off a bit by pulling together impressive dinners or baking scrumptious cookies to give as gifts. If all that extra kitchen time begins to sound like just another obligation, though, don't despair. In this issue of *Fine Cooking* we've included a collection of roasted dishes, from pork to beef to fish, that lend themselves to make-ahead prep. Then when it's party time, you can let the oven do the rest of the work. Even better, roasts practically guarantee leftovers, which always come in handy. And because you can't go all out all the time, we've also included some suggestions for smaller, casual get-togethers. Be sure to check recipe yields; you may need to double or halve recipes depending on your needs.

Casual entertaining

Mostly make-ahead

You can marinate the pork tenderloin up to four hours ahead and bake the steamed gingerbread up to a week ahead, as it only gets better with age.

Spice-Crusted Roast Pork Tenderloin, p. 102a

Roasted Potatoes

Applesauce

Steamed Coriander-Gingerbread Cake with Eggnog Crème Anglaise, p. 62

Easy Mediterranean

A meal in itself, served over a bed of couscous. You could also add a green salad to start.

Roasted Chicken Legs with Lemon and Green Olives, p. 102a

Couscous

Rugelach, p. 73

Brunch for friends & family

Check out the breakfast pull-out in this issue for even more brunch ideas.

Sweet Potato & Chile Hash with Fried Egg, p. 30a

Blueberry Muffins, p. 30a

Hot Cocoa, p. 88

Visit FineCooking.com to find recipes for applesauce, roasted potatoes, and couscous, as well as other side dishes.

Three holiday feasts

Each of these menus stars a different delicious roast. To make things easier, prepare the starters and desserts ahead.

Elegant beef tenderloin

Rosemary and Sea Salt Crackers, p. 45, served with a selection of cheeses and grapes

Beef Tenderloin with Wild Mushroom Stuffing, p. 50

Classic Potato Pancakes, p. 53

Roasted Brussels Sprouts with Dijon, Walnuts & Crisp Crumbs, p. 57

Ginger-Molasses Cheesecake, p. 65

Dramatic crown roast of pork

Leek Tart with Bacon & Gruyère, p. 23

Crown Roast of Pork with Fennel-Apple Stuffing, p. 48

Brussels Sprouts Braised with Pancetta, Shallot, Thyme & Lemon, p. 59

Ginger-Spice Ice Cream, p. 64, served with **Maple-Walnut Tuiles**, p. 76

Quick rack of lamb

Seeded Crackers, p. 45, with your favorite dip

Rack of Lamb with Ancho-Honey Glaze, p. 102a

Potato Pancakes Stuffed with Duxelles, p. 54

Sautéed Shredded Brussels Sprouts with Fresh Herbs & Crisp Shallots, p. 58

Gingerbread Pear Cobbler, p. 61



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from the editor

Saving your favorites

I am one of those people who gets *really* excited about Christmas. I decorate the house, make lots of cookies, have parties, and play annoying Christmas carols throughout the month of December. I actually like the chaos of Christmas shopping and the ritual of wrapping presents. I love to sit on the floor with a mug of hot cider, surrounded by paper and ribbons and boxes, and watch Rudolf or Frosty on TV. All this amazes my husband, a.k.a. The Grinch. Once he trucks the tree into the house, he's pretty much done with Christmas. Well, he'll be happy to know, this year he doesn't even have to worry about getting me a present. I've already got the best one I could have: the entire archive of *Fine Cooking* recipes.

So I'm hoping you're now saying, "Oh boy! Oh boy! Where do I get that? I've got to have it." You get it—and a whole lot more—if you visit the new FineCooking.com and become a member. Actually, we've upgraded the entire Web site, and there are exciting new features for everyone, whether you want to become

a member or not. Personally, I like the idea of being a member, because not only can I access all of those recipes, but I'll get to talk to our expert authors, see the entire current issue online, watch a whole new series of how-to videos, and try out a cool new interactive feature

I can save and organize all my favorite recipes in my virtual recipe file, called MyFineCooking.

called Create Your Own Recipe. Best of all, I can save and organize all my favorite recipes in my virtual recipe file, called MyFineCooking.

My own MyFineCooking file is going to get pretty big pretty quickly. I'll start with some of the *FC* recipes I've made the most over the years—Arroz Verde,

Chicken Under a Brick, Easy Pizza Dough, and Slow-Sautéed Green Beans, to name a few. Then I'll add some of our favorite family recipes, like my mom's pumpkin bread and her great spaghetti sauce (Letty's Sghetti). And then I'll have to go through all my back issues of *FC* to grab those recipes that have the sticky notes and the stains all over them. And this December issue alone has a ton of new recipes that I made a mental note to make at home after we tasted them in the test kitchen.

In fact, if the editor is allowed to have a favorite issue of the year, then I have to say, this one is it. I like everything about it, from the handsome cover to those delicious holiday roasts to that cool breakfast foldout. And I think I may have found my favorite cookie ever—contributing editor Abby Dodge's chocolate crackle cookie (be sure to make them with really good chocolate).

Happy holidays, and remember to go save your favorites on FineCooking.com.

—Susie Middleton, editor



Add to favorites:

Arroz Verde (Green Rice)

Serves six to eight.

- ½ cup tightly packed fresh cilantro sprigs (about ½ oz.)**
- 1 cup tightly packed fresh stemmed spinach leaves (about 1½ oz.)**
- 1¼ cups low-salt chicken broth**
- 1¼ cups milk**
- 1 tsp. salt**
- 3 Tbs. unsalted butter**
- 1 Tbs. olive oil**
- 1½ cups long-grain rice**
- ¼ cup finely minced onion**
- 1 clove garlic, minced**

Put the cilantro, spinach, and broth in a blender and blend until the vegetables are puréed. Add the milk and salt and blend a bit more until well combined.

In a medium (3-quart) heavy-based saucepan (with a good lid), heat the butter and olive oil over medium heat. When the butter is melted, add the rice and cook, stirring about every 30 seconds, until it just begins to brown, 3 to 4 minutes. Add the onion and garlic and cook 1 minute, stirring constantly. Add the contents of the blender, stir well, turn the heat to high, and bring to a boil. Cover the pan, turn the heat to low, and cook for 20 minutes. Stir the rice carefully to avoid crushing it, cover, and cook another 5 minutes. Take the pan off the heat and let the rice steam in the covered pot for 10 minutes. Serve hot.

—Jim Peyton (*Fine Cooking* #35)

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from our readers

**No room for gunk**

I've been a *Fine Cooking* subscriber for many years, and I love your magazine. I've never written to any magazine to express an idea or opinion, but your review of the Chef'n Switchit silicone spoon/spatula in *Fine Cooking* #87 (Equipment, p. 22) has compelled me to write. I agree with everything Lisa Waddle said about the tool, but in my opinion, she missed the best part—it's sanitary. There's no joint between the handle and the scraper/spoon where gunk can get stuck or mold can grow. I love these tools and have purchased them to give as gifts whenever I've found them, for no other reason than I want my friends to have the best spatula in the world.

—Erin Maffit, via email

Corn's finest hour

I've made many recipes from *Fine Cooking*, but tonight I made one of the most wonderful meals of my life, from the August/September issue (*Fine Cooking* #87). We had Grilled Tandoori-Style Chicken Thighs and Corn Sauté with Ginger, Garlic & Fresh Cilantro. My husband could not stop raving about the dinner. He's a huge corn-on-the-cob fan, so I wasn't sure he'd be OK with corn off the cob. He said it was "corn's finest hour." I had a large jalapeño on hand, so I substituted a quarter of it for the serrano; it was the perfect level of heat. But "Serves four as a side dish"—I think not. We devoured every kernel.

The chicken thighs were wonderfully tender and flavorful. I gave them a little less time than the author's suggested 4 to 5 minutes per side on the grill: 4 minutes one side, 2 minutes on the other side, and 3 minutes on the grill with the heat off. They were unbelievable. Thanks so much.

—Ellen Siegler,
Charlotte, North Carolina

Keep brown sugar moist in a Ball jar

Having read several suggestions lately for how to keep brown sugar moist, I felt compelled to write. The tip in your latest issue (*Fine Cooking* #88, Test Kitchen, p. 86)—keeping the sugar in its original bag inside a zip-top bag with a moist paper towel—is probably a good one. However, for a number of years I have been transferring what's left after the box is opened to a pint-size Ball jar (Ball being the brand name of those screw-top jars available in most supermarkets and most often used for canning). The sugar stays moist in the tightly sealed jar for months, and you needn't think about it periodically to wet your paper towels. The advantage to this solution is two-fold: You can always count on its being usable, no matter how long it's been on the pantry shelf, and you can see at a glance just how much is left in the jar. Though I haven't tried other screw-top jars, I would think something like a mayonnaise jar would work just as well if it has a tight-fitting lid.

—Dorothy Miller, via email

What about wine from Illinois?

In your article on all-American wines (Enjoying Wine, *Fine Cooking* #88) I found a serious omission. I am from Illinois, and I feel your author, Mr. Gaiser, must be unaware of the fine wines being produced in the numerous wineries in the southern counties of my state.

—Harold Osborn, via email

Editors' reply: We knew we'd be hearing from people in states we couldn't include. There are many wonderful wines produced throughout the United States, and we wish we could have mentioned more of them. It was a tough call, but for space reasons, we had to limit ourselves to six states. We're sorry Illinois wasn't among them. ♦

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While working as a chef at the Herbfarm restaurant in Seattle, **Lynne Sampson** ("Crackers," p. 44) baked rye crackers almost every day and learned just how simple it is to make (better) what typically comes out of a box. Lynne is now a professional baker and freelance writer based in eastern Oregon's Wallowa Mountains. Her baking recipes appear regularly in *The Oregonian*.

Allison Ehri Kreitler ("Stuffed Roasts," p. 46), *Fine Cooking's* test kitchen associate and food stylist, has recently embarked upon an exciting project for any serious cook: an elaborate home kitchen renovation. She's crossing her fingers that it's finished by the holidays, so she can serve her family one of the stuffed roasts she's developed for this issue. Before joining the staff of *Fine Cooking* almost three years ago, Allison worked as a freelance food stylist, recipe tester, and writer for several national food magazines.



Abigail Johnson Dodge



Julia M. Usher



Martha Holmberg

Arlene Jacobs ("Potato Pancakes," p. 52) loves to come up with inventive new recipes, but she still has a soft spot for the simple, tried-and-true dishes of her childhood. Here, she delivers both: her family's traditional recipe for crispy potato pancakes, as well as a few creative ways to jazz them up. Arlene is a restaurant consultant, freelance recipe developer, cooking instructor, and food writer.

Martha Holmberg ("Brussels Sprouts," p. 56), *Fine Cooking's* former publisher, moved to Portland, Oregon, three years ago, but we still reel her in to write for us. In this issue, she shares her tricks for cooking Brussels sprouts so that they're perfectly nutty and sweet. Martha is editor of the *The Oregonian* newspaper's food section, which recently won first prize

from The Association of Food Journalists. She's also the editor of the *Oregonian's* new quarterly food and wine magazine, *Mix*.

Julia M. Usher ("Gingerbread," p. 60) grew up baking and decorating gingerbread cookies during the holidays. But cutout cookies aren't the only sweets showing up at her holiday parties these days. "I love the challenge of coming up with new spins on a theme," she says. The former chef and owner of AzucArte, a bakery in St. Louis, Julia is now a freelance recipe developer, food stylist, and food writer, who splits her time between St. Louis and Maine. She is working on her first cookbook, to be published in the fall of 2009.

Nancie McDermott ("Thai Curries," p. 66) fell in love with Thai cuisine while volunteering with the Peace Corps in Thailand, where she lived for three years. She's an expert on Thai and other Southeast Asian cooking and has written numerous books on these cuisines, including *Real Thai*, *Real Vegetarian Thai*, and *Quick & Easy Thai*. She also teaches classes at cooking schools around the country. Her latest books, *300 Best Stir-Fry Recipes* and *Southern Cakes*, were published this year.

Because we work so far ahead, this issue's deadlines had contributing editor **Abigail Johnson Dodge** ("Cookies," p. 70) baking and eating holiday cookies in June. Not that she or her family complained. Abby's sixth cookbook, *The World on a Plate*, comes out next summer. It will focus on international cooking for children and adults, linking cultures through recipes, photographs, maps, and tips. Her most recent book is *The Weekend Baker*. ♦



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Salmon Hash with Dilled Crème Fraîche



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bonus web recipes

Only on FineCooking.com

In every issue, you'll find bonus recipes from our feature articles online. This month's extras:

From "Sprouting Up" (on p. 56 of this issue) comes another delicious Brussels sprouts side dish.

Roasted Brussels Sprouts with Brown Butter & Lemon



From "Thai on the Fly" (p. 66) a quick weeknight one-dish meal.

Green Curry with Cod & Green Beans



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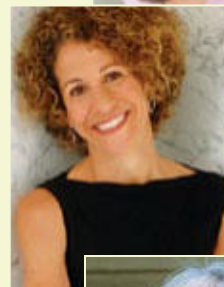
Post a question in our new forum and get a personal answer from the pros within 48 hours.

Susie Middleton, editor of *Fine Cooking*, takes on planning and timing your holiday dinner.



November 1 to November 21

Laura Werlin, *Fine Cooking* contributor and author of *The New American Cheese*, discusses serving cheese for holiday dinners and parties.



November 26 to December 9

Abigail Johnson Dodge, *Fine Cooking* contributing editor and author of *The Weekend Baker*, takes questions on holiday cookie baking.



December 3 to December 16

Create Your Own Recipe

This interactive feature lets you **build your own recipe** step by step, choosing ingredients, seasonings, and garnishes. Start out by creating your own bean and vegetable soup or bread stuffing; many more recipes are coming soon.

Web-Only Feature:

Comforting Quick Breads

by Carolyn Weil

Mini loaves make perfect holiday gifts. Our recipes include chocolate chip banana bread, pumpkin-spice bread, and cranberry-orange streusel loaf.



View the current
issue online

Miette Confiserie, Caitlin Williams and Megan Ray's colorful candy store, offers unusual candies from Europe and the United States, including handmade sweets from local artisans.

From Retro Cakes to Whimsical Candies

BY LAURA GIANNATEMPO

When the dot-com bubble burst in the Bay Area at the turn of the millennium, Megan Ray got bit by the baking bug and couldn't shake it off. She'd always loved to bake, but it wasn't until she was laid off that she got serious about it. She started Miette Pâtisserie without fanfare, selling cakes at the Berkeley farmers' market. Business was good and a couple of years later, with partner Caitlin Williams (also a dot-com casualty), she grabbed the opportunity to open a cake store in San Francisco's then-new Ferry Building.

From day one, they had a clear vision for their cakes' aesthetics: retro yet simple and modern, with a playful "girlie" sensibility. They were also strict about using only the freshest ingredients—organic and sustainably produced when-

ever possible—from nearby family farms and mills.

Miette was such a hit that customers clamored for another store in the city. But instead of replicating the pâtisserie, Megan and Caitlin recently opened Miette Confiserie, a charming candy store in the Hayes Valley district, complete with huge glass candy jars, lollipop trees, and candy bouquets. The shelves abound with rare, nostalgic, and humorous candies from small bakeries and candy stores all over the United States and Europe, along with sweets handmade by Bay Area artisans and in the bakery's own kitchen, from candied popcorn and cotton candy to rich, crunchy, ultrathin chocolate-and-nut-coated toffee. For more information, visit MietteCakes.com. ♦



Chocolate-covered toffee with toasted almonds is one of the candy store's best sellers.



Co-owner Caitlin Williams packages toffee fresh from Miette's kitchen.

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Good Things Come in Small Packages

Stocking stuffers that'll make any cook's holiday

BY REBECCA FREEDMAN



Perfect for tea for one: Scoop up tea with the wide end of this infuser; then set the narrow end into a mug of hot water. \$9 at BroadwayPanhandler.com.



These silicone measuring cups are flexible; just push the cups out to remove sticky or packed ingredients, like brown sugar. \$18 at LaPrimaShops.com.



Breakfast in bed? Try these clever egg cups—the top holds one egg, while a second stays warm hidden in the base. \$7.50 for two at SurLaTable.com.



For Asian food novices, beginner chopsticks make eating easier and more fun. \$3 at Pfaltzgraff.com.



Cuisipro's Accutec rasps come with a cover that'll catch and save the zest you grate. From \$12 at Amazon.com.



The Page scale is super compact, so it's ideal for small kitchens. About \$45 at LeifheitGoods.com.



Seafood lovers will appreciate these lobster crackers, which slide on a hinge to widen for large claws. \$25 at ChefCentral.com.



No more searching for that one missing measuring spoon; this magnetic set stays together in a drawer. \$8 at Amazon.com.



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Versatile leeks, supporting player or star of the show

BY RUTH LIVELY

There are a million reasons why I love leeks: They're sweet and mildly oniony, they're easy to prep, and they cook quickly. But most of all, I love leeks because they promise good eating. Unfortunately, these members of the onion family are easily overlooked on this side of the Atlantic. In France, where I spend several months each year, leeks are a day-in, day-out vegetable, a real kitchen workhorse. So I've grown accustomed to using them not only as an aromatic base for soups, stews, and braises or as a supporting player to other vegetables but also as a stand-alone vegetable (see sidebar, opposite page).

Leeks' delicate flavor and gentle sweetness work well with both tangy, vibrant vinaigrettes and with the richness of cream and cheese. Bacon, pancetta, and prosciutto are also good additions to any leek dish. And when I'm not serving them alone, I like to pair leeks with other cold-season vegetables like winter squash, celery root, fennel, parsnips, beets, and of course, potatoes for a classic leek and

potato soup. Leeks are excellent braised, roasted, and sautéed. Steaming is also a good method for cooking leeks before you toss them with a vinaigrette or finish them in the oven or on the grill.

For braising, roasting, and grilling, I prefer to cut cleaned and trimmed leeks in half lengthwise, but I usually slice them crosswise for sautés and salads.

Buying and storing

Leeks are available year-round, but they're at their best from early fall through winter and into spring. When buying leeks, look for firm, undamaged stalks and fresh-looking, brightly colored tops—the darker the tops, the older and tougher the leeks. The edible parts of leeks are the white and light-green portions (the dark-green leafy tops are usually cut off and discarded or used to flavor broths), so ideally, you want leeks with as much white stalk as possible. Wrapped in a damp paper towel and stored in a plastic bag in the refrigerator, leeks will last at least a week.

Clean them carefully

Since leeks are grown with soil piled all around them, there is plenty of opportunity for dirt and grit to settle between their onion-like layers. The easiest way to clean a leek is to trim the root end and the dark green tops and cut it in half lengthwise (or, if you want to retain the appearance of whole leeks in your dish, just cut about two-thirds of the way through the stalk, as shown at right). Hold the leek root-end-up under cold running water and riffle the layers as if they were a deck of cards. Do this on both sides a couple of times until all the dirt has been washed out.



Leek Tart with Bacon & Gruyère

*Serves six as a main course,
twelve as an appetizer.*

Paired with a green salad and a glass of crisp white wine, this tart is perfect for lunch or a light dinner. I also like to cut it into thin wedges and serve it as an appetizer along with aperitifs. It's delicious warm or at room temperature.

FOR THE TART SHELL:

9 oz. (2 cups) unbleached all-purpose flour
1 Tbs. chopped fresh thyme
¼ tsp. table salt
¼ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
**5½ oz. (11 Tbs.) cold unsalted butter, cut
into ½-inch cubes**
5 to 6 Tbs. ice-cold water

FOR THE FILLING:

3 thick slices bacon, cut into small dice
1 oz. (2 Tbs.) unsalted butter
**3 large leeks (white and light green parts
only), cleaned and sliced crosswise
¼ inch thick to yield about 4 cups**
1 Tbs. unbleached all-purpose flour
2 large eggs
⅓ cup heavy cream
⅓ cup whole milk
¾ tsp. kosher salt
⅛ tsp. freshly grated nutmeg
Freshly ground black pepper
⅔ cup grated Gruyère (or Emmentaler)

Make the tart shell: In a food processor, pulse the flour, thyme, salt, and pepper to blend thoroughly. Add the butter and pulse until the butter pieces are about the size of rice grains (about eight 1-second pulses). Add the ice water 1 Tbs. at a time through the feed tube while pulsing in short bursts until the dough starts coming together. It may still look crumbly, but if you press it with your fingers, it should become compact. (Don't add more water than absolutely necessary to get the dough to cling together.) Turn the dough out onto a clean work surface and, using your hands, gather and press the dough into a rough ball, blotting up the stray crumbs. Transfer the dough to a piece of waxed paper, shape it gently into a disk, and wrap it tightly to keep it from drying out. Refrigerate for at least 45 minutes. (The dough can be made up to 2 days ahead.)

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 450°F.

Unwrap the dough, set it on a lightly floured surface, and if necessary, let sit until pliable. Roll the dough out to a 14-inch circle about ⅛ inch thick.

Transfer the dough to an 11-inch fluted tart pan with a removable bottom and press it carefully into the corners and up the sides



of the pan. Let the edges of the dough hang over the rim of the pan and then roll the rolling pin over the top of the pan to cut away the excess dough. Prick the surface of the dough all over with a fork, line it with parchment, and fill it with pie weights or dried beans. Put the pan on a rimmed baking sheet and bake until the edges of the tart shell are dry and flaky (but not browned), about 10 minutes. Remove the weights and parchment; the center should still be moist and raw. Prick the bottom again and return the shell to the oven. Bake until the bottom surface is completely dry, 5 to 7 minutes more. Remove from the oven and let cool. Lower the oven temperature to 375°F.

Make the filling: In a 12-inch skillet, cook the bacon over medium heat until it's crisp and golden brown, about 5 minutes. With a slotted spoon, transfer the bacon to a dish and set aside. Discard all but about 2 tsp. of the bacon fat. Set the skillet over medium-low heat, add the butter, let it melt, and then add the leeks. Stir to coat them with the fat, cover, and cook, stirring occasionally, until soft, 8 to 10 minutes. Stir the flour into the leeks and cook uncovered, stirring, for about 2 minutes to cook off the raw-flour flavor. Set aside and let cool slightly.

In a medium bowl, lightly whisk the eggs. Add the cream, milk, salt, nutmeg, and several grinds of pepper and whisk until blended. Add the bacon and leeks to the mixture and stir to combine.

To assemble the tart, scatter ⅓ cup cheese over the cooled tart shell and pour in the egg mixture. Spread the leeks evenly. Scatter the remaining ⅓ cup cheese evenly over the top. Bake until the custard is set and the top is light golden brown, about 35 minutes. Let cool on a rack for at least 30 minutes before serving.

Store leftovers in the refrigerator, covered. Reheat for 10 to 15 minutes at 350°F.

Tasty ideas starring leeks

For rich braised leeks, brown halved leeks in butter or olive oil; then deglaze the pan with white wine. Add a little chicken broth, cover, and simmer until tender. Finish with chopped fresh thyme.

Toss together a zesty salad. Steam thin leek slices until barely tender and then toss with soy sauce, rice vinegar, lime or lemon juice, and toasted sesame seeds.

Make a comforting leek gratin. Steam leek halves until barely tender and then layer them in a buttered baking dish with white sauce and sautéed bacon bits. Top with Gruyère and breadcrumbs and bake until brown and bubbling.

For a hearty side or vegetarian main course, toss halved leeks in olive oil, salt, and pepper and roast until tender and lightly browned. Serve on top of hot, creamy polenta with a generous dab of Gorgonzola.

*Ruth Lively cooks, writes, and gardens
in New Haven, Connecticut. ♦*

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A Chinese Christmas Surprise
by Joanne Smart, Special Issues Editor, *Fine Cooking*

Long before “A Christmas Story”
made it popular, my parents would
take us out for Chinese food on Christmas Eve.
I don’t know how this tradition started, but for a few years running,
we would go to 5 o’clock Mass and then over to the beautiful Jade Fountain.

For the rest of Joanne’s
story visit our Web site.
To enter our Sweeps go to
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Laura Werlin is an expert on American cheese and the author of four books on the topic, including her brand-new *Laura Werlin's Cheese Essentials*.

Serving Cheese

It's not hard to put together a cheese selection; just follow some basic guidelines

I recently received a set of three differently shaped cheese knives. Which should be used for which cheese?

—Hilary Drake, Stamford, Connecticut

You'll find that each knife is specially shaped to handle a certain texture of cheese. A **skeleton knife** has a 3- to 5-inch blade with large holes cut out of the middle. Because there's far less surface area on the blade for creamy cheese to stick to, this type of knife is great for soft cheeses like Brie. A **forked knife** is an all-purpose cheese knife and can be used for most cheeses, from mozzarella to Cheddar. Think of the forked tip as a toothpick and use it to pick up a piece of cheese you've just cut and transfer it to your plate. Just don't eat from it. The **triangular-shaped knife** is short and stubby, ideal

for digging chunks out of hard cheeses like Parmigiano-Reggiano. You won't get nice, neat slices with this type of knife, but that's not the goal.



In future issues we'll tackle yeast, chocolate, and eating local. Send your questions on these topics to Ask the Expert, *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506, or by email to fcqa@taunton.com.

How many cheeses should I include on a cheese board? What guidelines should I follow on what types of cheeses to choose?

—Sylvie Molnar, Bainbridge Island, Washington

First, think about when you're serving the cheese. For an after-dinner cheese course, you need no more than three cheeses and preferably just one or two. If you're serving cheese as an hors d'oeuvre, one great cheese can be enough. Go for a perfectly ripe Camembert or a wedge of Gruyère. As for amount, plan on a little less than 1 ounce per person. Third, let your main course determine the specific cheeses. If you're serving fish, then go for a selection of lighter style cheeses, like goat cheese, Brie, and creamy blue cheeses. If you're serving meat, plan on just one or two cheeses, such as an American cloth-wrapped Cheddar, an aged Gouda, or a crumbly-style blue cheese like Stilton. Aim for variety in terms of texture or the type of milk the cheese is made from.

What are some good complements to a selection of cheeses, besides crackers and bread?

—Noreen Wooten, Dumfries, Virginia

Don't reinvent the wheel when it comes to pairing cheese with other foods. Fresh goat cheese has a natural affinity to olives. A salty and pungent blue cheese is great with sweet things such as honey, dried figs, and jams. Compotes, toasted nuts, and

Storing tips

- ❖ Take your cheeses out of the refrigerator at least one hour before serving.
- ❖ Keep cheese in the drawer of your refrigerator, where the humidity and temperature are the highest.
- ❖ Wrap firmer cheeses and blue cheeses in waxed paper followed loosely by plastic wrap, which allows the cheese to breathe without letting plastic touch its surface.
- ❖ Store soft and creamy cheese unwrapped in a plastic container and poke a few small holes in the lid, to keep the cheese from suffocating.

other dried fruit are great with all but the mildest cheeses. Although apples and cheese may be one of the oldest pairings around, it's actually not the best. The high acidity of the apples makes them taste sour next to many cheeses. ♦



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what's new

Measure & prep

This set of five small nesting bowls makes mise en place easy. Made of flexible silicone, each also serves as a measuring cup, with measurements printed inside and a raised ridge denoting half measurements. The set, with bowls from 1/8 cup to 2 cups, costs \$20 and is part of Food Network's new line of cookware and bakeware, available exclusively at Kohl's stores.



Surgical precision

Lives may not depend on your coring an apple just right or cutting a neat slice of pizza, but it's nice to know that the same expertise that goes into making surgical tools is behind this latest line of kitchen gadgets. Made by California-based Van Vacter Products, the tools all feature thick black handles similar to those on a motorbike, for a comfortable, nonslip grip. Each tool is specific to a task—an avocado knife, a cheese grater—and has well-thought-out features. The pizza knife (\$20), for example, has a second wheel that trails behind the cutter to break through any remaining cheese or crust. Needless to say, all the tools are scalpel sharp. You can buy them at CoolFoodTools.com.



Dress your plate

Plastic squeeze bottles are the not-so-secret garnishing weapon of professional chefs, who use them to drizzle desserts with melted chocolate, dot sauces on a dinner plate, or squiggle dressings over a salad. Here's a stylish update to the standard mustard-style bottle, featuring angled silicone tips in two diameters. Each bottle holds 2 cups and comes with a cap, making it easy to store your sauce or dressing in the fridge. Sold at Williams-Sonoma stores for \$10 (narrow green tip) and \$11 (wide gray tip).

Prep bowls	28
Pizza cutter	28
Squeeze bottles	28
Baking peel	30
Oven rack guard	30
New stand mixer	30
Bar cart	32
Wooden utensils	32
Ratchet corkscrew	32
Baking sheet	34
Nonstick muffin tins	34
Silicone & metal pan	34

BY LISA WADDLE

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Beyond the peel

Baking peels can be intimidating to use, but here's a version that makes moving all types of dough easier. Called the Super Peel, it combines a baker's peel with a pastry cloth, resulting in a hand-held conveyor belt that can transport pizza onto a baking stone or move cutout cookies to a cookie sheet. While traditional peels require a jerk action to slide pizza or bread into the oven (which can dislodge toppings or deflate delicate doughs), the Super Peel is gentler because you hold the peel with one hand and with the other move a plastic clip that rotates the cloth. The pastry cloth must be floured, but it proved to be nonstick with pie crust, bread, pizza, and cookies. Made of maple, with a reversible pastry cloth, the Super Peel is \$34 at SuperPeel.com.

Don't get burned

When I worked in a professional bakery, my arms were striped with burn marks from brushing against hot oven racks as I retrieved cookie sheets. So I was jazzed to see this Cool Touch oven rack guard from JAZ Innovations. Made of the same heat- and flame-resistant fiber used in the protective clothing for firefighters, the padded fabric strips are 18 inches

long and wrap around the front of the oven rack, snapping into place. They resist heat up to 500°F (you need to remove them when you run the broiler), and yes, they do work. I intentionally touched them during testing, and while they got warm, they weren't nearly hot enough to burn my arm. They're \$20 for two, and you can buy them at JazInnovations.com.



Newest stand mixer

Cuisinart has introduced its first stand mixer, designed to give other high-end models a run for their money. Available in 5.5-quart (\$350) and 7-quart (\$450) bowl capacities, the mixer boasts 12 speeds and comes with the standard attachments—paddle, whisk, and dough hook.

Contributing editor and baking guru Abigail Johnson Dodge put the 7-quart mixer through its paces in her kitchen and found the large machine “surprisingly lightweight.” It did a great job with tasks big (whipping 4 cups of cream) and small (whipping a single cup), thanks to the tapered bowl, which allows the attachments to reach all the way to the bottom and sides. The disadvantage of that shape, Abby found, is that its height and narrow base make it awkward to scrape the sides and scoop out or pour batter from the bowl.

At 800 watts for the 5.5-quart and 1,000 watts for the 7-quart, the Cuisinarts are among the most powerful stand mixers available and easily handled stiff bread dough without hopping around the counter. Unique to the Cuisinart: a 15-minute countdown timer that turns off the mixer after the selected time has elapsed (more of a novelty than a necessity, Abby thought) and a “fold” speed, a slower option that did a good job of incorporating flour into cake batter.

If you're looking to make a design statement with your mixer, this is your machine. Standing 14½ inches tall (21 inches with the mixer head tilted up) and 15 inches wide, it is slightly smaller than other stand mixers, yet its overall design gives it an impressive appearance. It comes in white or brushed chrome and has three ports for attachments (avail-



Cuisinart 7-quart stand mixer

able separately), including a pasta maker, a blender, and a 3-cup food processor. You can get more information and buy the mixers at Cuisinart.com.



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Keeping your favorite cook happy

Whether you're looking for a small hostess gift or a more extravagant splurge for that special someone, kitchen tools are thoughtful and practical. Here are some we wouldn't mind getting ourselves.

A wheel splurge

Here's an idea for the cook on your list who's been very good: beautiful rolling work and storage carts made of laminated bamboo, similar to the intricate cutting boards we've seen everywhere of late. The Kitchen Cart, at \$1,075, has a storage cabinet and drawer, removable cutting board, and side racks for towels or condiments. The Bar Cart (left), at \$1,125, is similar in style but with a wine cubby to accommodate 18 bottles and a hanging stemware rack. Both are 36 inches high, with locking casters, making them useful wherever you need an extra work or serving surface. You can buy them at TotallyBamboo.com.



Beautiful & functional

If you're looking for a present for the cook who has everything, why not replace an essential tool with a piece of art? These wooden tools are just two of 60 spoons, spatulas, and paddles crafted of cherry and maple by Pennsylvania-based Mark Hamm. Beyond their good looks, the tools feel wonderful in the hand, with a silky-smooth finish and nice balance. Each piece is shaped for a specific task, such as the Stir-Fry Tool (\$11), at left, and the Sauté Stirrer (\$17). Setting the tools apart are the details: Several include a notch in the handle, to allow the spoon to sit on the edge of a pan, and many can be ordered in right- or left-hand versions. See the complete line and purchase at CPBasils.com.



Ratchet it up

I love this new Wine Ratchet from Built NY Inc. Unlike the ubiquitous lever openers, the Ratchet puts a little effort back into popping a cork. Acting and sounding much like the ratchet wrench that inspired it, this corkscrew is cranked into a cork with a repeated twist of the wrist. At the base of the screw is a metal washer with teeth that grab onto the cork; then you just pull to uncork. Particularly nice is the inclusion of two interchangeable screws—a thicker, wire-type screw for older, longer corks and a thinner, auger-type screw for shorter and synthetic corks. Cost is \$100, at BuiltNY.com.

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New baking essentials

As you gear up for your holiday baking, having the best tools can make all the difference. Here are some updates to essential equipment no baker should be without.

CIA shares its secrets

Drawing on its 60-year history as a training ground for chefs, the Culinary Institute of America has come out with a line of cookware and bakeware designed by its teaching chefs. We like the nonstick cookie sheet; it's made of heavy-duty steel and comes in a light platinum color, which helps prevent overbrowning. One side is angled to create a secure handle, while the three flat edges make it easy to slide the cookies off. At 14x17³/₄ inches, it's slightly larger than other baking sheets. Be sure it's not too big for your oven; you want to leave 2 inches of room on each side of a cookie sheet so that air can circulate. The sheet is \$30 at CIACook.com.



Release me

We've liked the Doughmakers line of shiny aluminum pans for cookies, cakes, and pies since they came out several years ago, and now they've added muffin pans. The 12-cup standard size (pictured above), 6-cup jumbo, and 24-cup mini-muffin pans all feature the line's heavy-gauge aluminum and patented textured surface—called a “pebble pattern”—that leads to wonderful browning and no sticking (even without any Teflon or silicone lining). It also means they are easy to clean. Each is \$26, and you can find a retailer near you at Doughmakers.com.

update

Silicone meets metal

First our kitchens were rocked by all-silicone bakeware, brilliantly stick-resistant and colorful but floppy. Then came another generation of silicone pans, thicker and sturdier yet failing to conduct heat as well as the old reliable metal. Now, Kaiser Bakeware has united silicone and metal for the best of both materials. The La Forme Perfect collection consists of steel bakeware lined with silicone. Cakes and breads released cleanly from the heavy-duty pans with only a light spray of oil or butter, and they also browned evenly and developed a nice crust. Absent are the bright colors of other silicone bakeware; this dark-gray lining matches the pan. Cost is \$37 for a 10-inch loaf pan; \$50 for a 9-cup Bundt; \$64 for a 10-inch springform with a regular and a tube base. Buy them at KaiserBakeware.com. ♦



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What's the best type of glass for sherry?

Traditionally, sherry is served in a copita, like the one at near left, a small tulip-shaped glass that's a cross between a thin white-wine glass and a Champagne flute (see Where to Find It, p. 90).

Discovering Sherry

BY TIM GAISER

Think beyond dessert—sherry can be a perfect aperitif or an ideal match for dinner

If the word sherry makes you think of cheap cooking wine or granny's ultra-sweet after-dinner libation, you might want to reconsider. While most people associate sherry with sweetness, many high-quality sherries are anything but sweet. In fact, they're excellent dry wines that are perfectly suitable for a variety of foods, not just dessert.

The name sherry derives from Jerez de la Frontera, the town and region in the southern part of Spain where the wine is made. Sherry is a product of the region's hot, arid climate. It's not uncommon for temperatures to climb above 100°F in Jerez during the growing season, and hot winds keep the climate bone dry. If it weren't for the chalk-laden soil, called *albariza*, it would be impossible to grow wine grapes. Albariza soil, however, dries to a hard protective shell during the hot summer months, trapping moisture beneath the surface and allowing vine roots access to water.

A fortified wine

Made primarily from Palomino grapes, sherry is a fortified wine, which means that a neutral spirit is added during production. In the case of sherry,

that spirit is a colorless, odorless brandy called *aguardiente*. Unlike port and sweet Madeira, the other major fortified wines, in which fortification takes place during fermentation and leaves residual sugar in the wine, sherry is fortified after fermentation, when the wine is completely dry. Dessert sherries are then sweetened with boiled, reduced grape juice or sweetened wine.

Aged with an unusual system

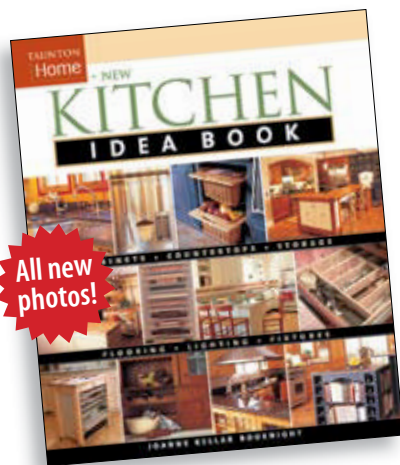
Sherries are aged a minimum of two years in oak barrels, called butts, using the traditional solera system, a technique of blending in which older wine is refreshed by younger wine of the same type to maintain consistency of style. A solera is a series of barrels in which each successive vintage is held separately. Wine is bottled from the oldest barrels, which are then topped with wine from the next-oldest barrels, and so forth. By law, the barrels can never be emptied by more than one third at a time. Some soleras are well over a hundred years old and contain thousands of barrels of wine. Wines from an older solera indicate the year of its founding on the label, even though each bottle contains only a few scant drops of the oldest wine in the solera.

How do you store sherry?

Like other fine wines, sherry should be stored in a dark place at a temperature between 55° and 60° F. Fino and manzanilla sherries are very delicate. Once opened, they lose their freshness within a day or two. That's why I highly recommend purchasing these sherries in half-bottles and only from wine shops that stock them regularly. The richer sherries, such as olorosos and sweet sherries, will keep for several days when opened. In general, it's always best to use a clamp-on bottle stopper in place of the original cork to prevent air from seeping into the bottle.

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Sherry Styles

There are several styles of sherry, based on how strongly they're fortified and on whether and how long they've been exposed to air.



Fino

One of the driest and most elegant styles of sherry, fino is fortified to about 15% alcohol, allowing a frothy layer of yeast called "flor" to develop on the surface after fermentation. Flor is a vital component of fino, protecting it from contact with air and giving it a characteristic tangy quality. A deep straw color, fino sherries have a nutty, mineraly flavor with suggestions of pressed flowers and preserved citrus.

What to pair it with: Enjoy it chilled with fresh shell fish, any kind of tapas, and lighter appetizers.

Bottles to try:
NV Lustau Solera Reserva Puerto Fino, \$14 (750 ml)
NV González Byass Tio Pepe Fino, \$9 (375 ml)

Amontillado

This is a type of sherry whose flor layer dies after a certain period of time, allowing the wine to oxidize, that is, to come in contact with air and develop raisiny, caramel-like flavors. Stylistically, amontillados fall between finos and dry olorosos, displaying a medium-golden amber color and a smooth, dry character, with flavors of bitter chocolate, coffee, raisins, and a distinctive nuttiness.

What to pair it with: Serve it slightly chilled as an aperitif with olives, almonds, and hard cheeses. Amontillado is also a classic accompaniment to rich soups.

Bottles to try:
NV Lustau Solera Reserva Dry Amontillado "Los Arcos," \$14 (750 ml)
NV Hartley & Gibson Amontillado, \$12 (750 ml)

Palo Cortado

Palo cortado is a rare style of sherry that loses its layer of flor, as does an amontillado, but develops more of an oloroso richness while maintaining some of fino's delicate nuance.

What to pair it with: Serve it slightly chilled as an aperitif or with roast beef or lamb.

Bottle to try:
NV Lustau Solera Reserva Palo Cortado "Peninsula," \$22 (750 ml)

Manzanilla

This is a special fino produced in and around the coastal town of Sanlúcar de Barrameda. The region's higher humidity results in a thicker layer of flor that gives manzanilla remarkable delicacy, elegance, and a slightly briny flavor.

What to pair it with: Enjoy it chilled with fish and shell fish, chicken, or tapas like olives, marcona almonds (a type of Spanish almonds), and jamón serrano (Spanish prosciutto).

Bottles to try:
NV Hidalgo Manzanilla "La Gitana," \$10 (500 ml)
NV Lustau Manzanilla "Papirusa," \$12 (750 ml)

Oloroso

Oloroso, which means scented, is a rich, deeply colored wine that's fortified to a higher alcohol level (about 18%) to prevent flor from developing. It's aged and oxidized longer than amontillados (three years or longer), so it develops rich flavors of raisins, dates, prunes, roasted nuts, and caramel. Traditional olorosos are dry, but sweet olorosos are produced as well.

What to pair it with: Serve dry olorosos at cellar temperature (55° to 60°F) as an aperitif with nuts, olives, and dried figs, or with roasted or braised meats, hearty sides, and rich cheeses.

Bottles to try:
Osborne Dry Oloroso "Bailén," \$18 (750 ml)
NV Lustau Solera Reserva Dry Oloroso "Don Nuño," \$18 (750 ml)

Sweet sherries

There are several kinds of sweet sherry, including medium-sweet cream sherry, the dessert-sweet East India sherry (both sweet olorosos), and the Pedro Ximenez and Moscatel varietal sherries. Sweet sherries usually display caramel and dried fruit flavors.

What to pair them with: Enjoy cream sherries as an aperitif, chilled or over ice. The sweeter East India and varietal sherries are good with chocolate desserts or sipped solo in place of dessert.

Bottles to try:
NV Harveys Bristol Cream, \$12 (750 ml)
NV Lustau East India Sherry, \$21 (750 ml)
NV Osborne Pedro Ximenez 1827, \$14 (750 ml)
NV Lustau Solera Reserva Moscatel Superior "Emilin," \$22 (750 ml) ♦

Contributing editor Tim Gaiser is a master sommelier and wine educator. ♦

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Winning tip

Freeze spoons for defatting stocks

When I'm making a soup or a stock, I toss a few slotted metal spoons into the freezer. After letting the stock cool a bit, I skim the top with one of the frozen spoons. The fat congeals on the back of the metal spoon, while the stock slides through. You generally get only one pass per spoon, because once they warm up they don't attract the fat.

—Tara Heam, Victoria, British Columbia

A prize for the best tip

We want your best tips. We'll pay for the ones we publish, and we'll give a prize for the cleverest tip in each issue. Write to Tips, *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506 or email fc tips@taunton.com.

The prize for this issue's winner: Edgecraft model 130 professional sharpening station; retail value, \$149.



Ice cream scoop works for squash, too

Squash is so plentiful in the fall that I cook with it a lot. I prefer to roast butternut and acorn squash, because roasting intensifies their natural flavor. I've found that an ice cream scoop is excellent at removing the squash from the shell after baking.

—Brian Wigley, via email

Making cookie logs perfectly square

To make logs of refrigerator cookies in a square shape, I line an aluminum foil or plastic wrap box with plastic wrap and then press the dough inside. I put the dough-filled box in the fridge to chill. The result is a uniform, precisely shaped log.

—Lorelee Kimbley, Calgary, Alberta

Freeze lemongrass to have on hand

Many recipes that call for lemongrass require only part of a large stalk. Instead of wasting the pricey herb, I found a way to extend its life. I buy three or four stalks at a time, cut away the woody exterior, and grind the stalks in a food processor. I store this ground lemongrass in zip-top bags in the freezer and have found that it keeps for a long time. I can take out just a tablespoon or so to use for that night's recipe.

—Linda Rittelmann, Baltimore, Maryland

Turn a mistake into rave reviews

I recently made a batch of the blondies (from *Fine Cooking* #82) but made the mistake of baking them too long. The result was a batch of hard, inedible bars. I hated to waste the ingredients, so I put these "mistakes" into a food processor and ground them up. This gave me a supply of toffee-like crunch that I sprinkled on ice cream, yogurt, and fresh fruit—to rave reviews. (And the second batch of blondies I baked came out perfect.)

—Kathleen Delaney, Arlington Heights, Illinois



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Don't lose small fruit when dipping

We like to give holiday gifts of chocolate-dipped dried fruits but always seemed to lose a number of dried apricots in the dipping pan. We came up with the idea of skewering each apricot with a toothpick and then dipping it into the chocolate. We then poke the toothpick into a piece of styrofoam covered with waxed paper or parchment and leave the apricot there until the chocolate hardens.

—Anne and Pat Costello,
Newton, Massachusetts

TOO GOOD TO FORGET

From *Fine Cooking* #13

Flat-freezing vegetables without sticking

When you flat-freeze vegetables, they sometimes stick to the pan's surface. I line a jellyroll pan or baking sheet with a linen dish-towel and spread the produce on the towel in a single layer. I freeze the produce until hard and then transfer it to storage bags. The towel absorbs any excess water and prevents the fruits or vegetables from sticking to the pan.

—Susan Asanovic,
Wilton, Connecticut

Dry out clay baker with baking soda

I use my clay baker quite often but find that when I pull it out of the cupboard it often has mold in it, because the porous clay holds moisture. I solved this problem by sprinkling the inside of the baker with baking soda before putting it away and storing it with the lid off. When I'm ready to cook, I quickly rinse it out, and I'm all set to go.

—Anne Tufts, Agassiz, British Columbia

STAFF CORNER

Grated garlic adds a nice finish

When making pasta sauce that includes sautéed garlic, I often boost the flavor by grating a little bit of raw garlic (about half a clove) right into the sauce during the last few minutes of simmering. (I use a rasp-style grater so the garlic is very fine.) Because of the brief cooking, you don't get a raw garlic flavor, but that extra bit adds a deliciously rich undertone, especially in cream sauces.

—Joanne Smart,
special issues editor

Nondairy alternative for ganache

I have been working with chocolate for many years and am considered an excellent truffle maker. Several years ago, I pondered how to make my famous candy for my vegan son and lactose-intolerant daughter. After trying various soy milk and rice milk combinations, which didn't taste good, I hit upon coconut cream as a substitute for heavy cream. It works beautifully and has about the same consistency. It imparts a subtle coconut flavor and is a great way to offer a treat to those with special dietary needs.

—Maria Brandriff, Hamden, Connecticut

Sieve keeps small cookie cutters from getting lost

My small round cookie cutters often fell down the drain into the garbage disposal at cleaning time, until I came up with an easy solution. Since I already had my sieve out to sift flour for the recipe, I put the sieve in the sink and then put the cutters in the sieve as I was done with them. This also eased cleaning. After I scrubbed each cutter, I put it back in the sieve and rinsed them all at once.

—Laura Rose, Naugatuck, Connecticut

Hold cutting board in place

I keep a large maple cutting board on my stone countertop all the time. To prevent the board from sliding around on the smooth surface, I position four inexpensive rubber hose washers (which you can buy at most hardware stores) under the board near the corners. The rubber prevents any movement and keeps the board solidly in place. This works for plastic cutting boards, too.

—James Knodell, Seattle, Washington ♦



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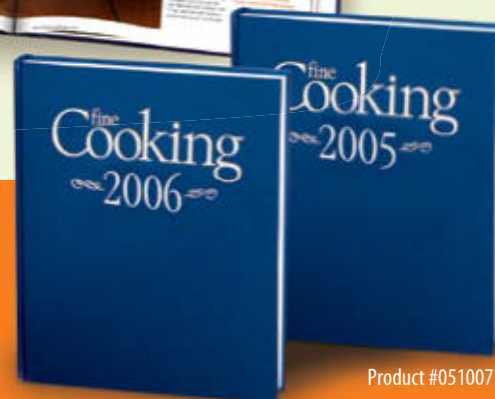
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Surprise Your Guests with Homemade Crackers

An easy dough
makes baking these
crackers a breeze

BY LYNNE SAMPSON

The more I entertain, the more I realize that it's the small details that make the biggest impression. Take these homemade crackers. Unfussy and quick to make, even for the most pastry-challenged, they bake beautifully into crisp, light flatbread-style snacks. Perfect with wine and cheese at a cocktail party or with crocks of soup at an after-ski gathering, these crackers always have my guests begging for the recipe. Who would have guessed that a simple cracker could be such a hit?

The dough needs no yeast, no kneading, and no elaborate mixing. In a single bowl, a blend of all-purpose and whole-wheat flour with only salt, water, and a splash of olive oil comes together quickly. You'll have a dough that will smooth and stretch easily as you roll it nice and thin for the snappiest, brownest crackers. I don't trim the dough before cutting it into rectangles, because I love how the slightly ragged edge gives them a rustic charm. Plus, that way, there's no wasted dough. A light coating of water with a pastry brush helps the topping adhere and also sweeps away any excess flour that would dull the crackers' surface as they bubble, curl, and brown.

Seeded Crackers

*Yields about 3½ dozen
2x4-inch crackers.*

The dough can be refrigerated for two days or frozen for up to a month, and then thawed for two hours at room temperature.

FOR THE TOPPING:

1 Tbs. sesame seeds
2 tsp. poppy seeds
2 tsp. fennel or caraway seeds
¾ tsp. kosher salt

FOR THE DOUGH:

**6¾ oz. (1½ cups) unbleached
all-purpose flour; more for rolling**
2 oz. (scant ½ cup) whole-wheat flour
1 tsp. table salt
3 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil

Position a rack in the lower third of the oven and heat the oven to 450°F.

Make the topping: In a small bowl, stir the sesame seeds, poppy seeds, and fennel or caraway seeds. Fill another small bowl with water and set it aside along with a pastry brush and the kosher salt.

Make the dough: In a large bowl, whisk the all-purpose flour, whole-wheat flour, and table salt. Add the olive oil and ½ cup water to the flour; stir with a rubber spatula until it collects into a soft, crumbly ball of dough. Use the spatula or your hands to press the dough against the sides of the bowl to gather all the stray flour.

Set the dough on a lightly floured work surface and portion it into thirds. Pat each portion into a square. Set two squares aside and cover with a clean towel. Roll the remaining dough into a rectangle about ⅛ inch thick and 7 or 8 inches wide by 14 or 15 inches long. Whenever you feel resistance, lift up one edge of the dough and sprinkle more flour underneath before you continue rolling.

With a pastry brush, brush the dough lightly with water and sprinkle about a third of the seed mix evenly over the surface. Sprinkle with ¼ tsp. of the kosher salt. With a dough scraper, pizza cutter, ravioli cutter, or sharp knife, cut the dough in half lengthwise and then cut across to make rectangles roughly 2 by 4 inches. Don't bother trimming the edges; rustic edges add character. Transfer to an unlined baking sheet. Bake until nicely browned, about 10 minutes. Let cool on a wire rack.

While each batch is baking, clean your work surface as needed and repeat the rolling and cutting with the remaining portions of dough. Store the cooled crackers in a zip-top plastic bag. They'll keep for up to a week.

VARIATION

Rosemary & Sea Salt Crackers

Add 2 Tbs. chopped fresh rosemary to the dry ingredients in the dough. Skip the seed topping and instead sprinkle each batch of crackers with ¼ tsp. fine sea salt.



Roll the dough into a very thin rectangle; the thinner the dough, the snappier the crackers.



Cut the dough into smaller rectangles and don't worry about trimming the outer edges.

Lynne Sampson is a food writer living in Joseph, Oregon. ♦



Crown Roast of Pork with Fennel-Apple
Stuffing & Cider-Bourbon Sauce

BY ALLISON EHRI KREITLER

For a special holiday dinner, learn how to stuff, cook, and sauce an impressive pork or beef roast

Roasts to Boast About



Beef Tenderloin with Wild Mushroom
Stuffing & Port Wine Sauce

The holidays present a wonderful excuse to show off in the kitchen. So at this time of year—for at least one night—why not pull out all the stops and make something really fancy: a stuffed crown roast of pork or a stuffed beef tenderloin, served with an elegant sauce. Though these roasts are sophisticated in both flavor and appearance, you don't have to sacrifice your whole evening for the sake of a fabulous presentation. A few make-ahead strategies ensure that you can both impress your guests and enjoy the party.

A stuffed beef tenderloin comes together more easily than you'd think. I make a rich, earthy mushroom filling ahead of time and

freeze it in a log shape. Then when I butterfly the tenderloin (a few simple cuts, and it opens like a book), all I have to do is lay the log down the center of the roast, fold the roast back up and tie it neatly. You can do this a day ahead. Cooking is simple, too. Instead of searing the meat on the stovetop, which is cumbersome, I oven-sear it by starting the roasting at a high temperature.

A crown roast of pork is a real showstopper, yet it's even easier to stuff than a beef tenderloin. Since you buy the roast already tied (see the sidebar on p. 48), all you have to do is treat the center of the roast like a bowl and fill it up. As with the beef, I start the pork in a very hot oven to brown it, but

I wait to stuff it until partway through roasting. This helps the pork cook more evenly. And the stuffing for the pork—which has a delicious all-American flavor profile of bacon, apples, and cider—can be mostly made ahead, too.

A robust sauce is the finishing touch. In a restaurant, a rich meat stock, which takes many hours to make, is the backbone of a good sauce. To give my sauces intense flavor in less time, I punch them up with bold ingredients like port, porcini, bourbon, and cider and simmer to concentrate their flavors. If you like, make your sauce ahead, so all it will need is reheating and a few final touches.

Crown Roast of Pork with Fennel-Apple Stuffing & Cider-Bourbon Sauce

Serves ten to fourteen.

FOR THE SAUCE:

1 quart apple cider
2 cups bourbon
2 cups low-salt chicken broth
½ cup sour cream
1 Tbs. cider vinegar; more to taste
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

FOR THE STUFFING:

1 lb. Tuscan bread (or similar crusty artisan-style bread), cut into ½-inch cubes (8 to 9 cups)
8 oz. bacon (8 to 10 slices), cut crosswise into ½-inch-wide strips
2½ oz. (5 Tbs.) unsalted butter
2 medium-small yellow onions, cut into small dice (about 2 cups)
1 medium fennel bulb, cut into medium dice (about 3 cups)
1 tsp. kosher salt; more to taste
½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper; more to taste

4 medium Granny Smith apples, peeled, cored, and cut into ½-inch pieces (about 4 cups)

2 Tbs. bourbon
2 Tbs. apple cider
2 Tbs. chopped fresh marjoram
1 Tbs. chopped fresh sage
2 tsp. fennel seeds, lightly chopped or pulsed in a spice grinder
½ tsp. ground allspice
2 to 2½ cups low-salt chicken broth

FOR THE ROAST:

16-rib crown roast of pork (8½ to 9½ lb.), chine bone removed and bones frenched; see sidebar below for more information
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

Follow steps 1 through 5, starting at right.



1 Make the sauce reduction

Put the cider, bourbon, and chicken broth in a 3- to 4-quart (preferably 8-inch-wide) saucepan and bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce the heat to maintain a very brisk simmer and cook until the sauce has reduced to 1¼ cups, about 1 hour. Set aside until the roast is done. (The sauce can be made to this point and refrigerated up to 2 days ahead.)

wine pick

Look for a big, well-oaked yet balanced Burgundy-style Chardonnay to go with the robust sweet-tart flavors of the crown roast of pork. The Matanzas Creek Winery 2005 Chardonnay from Sonoma Valley (\$30) makes a stunning pairing.



Buying a crown roast of pork

Butchers can cut a crown roast of pork in more than one way, so I found it helpful to have photos of what I did (and didn't) want my roast to look like.

Do: Ask the butcher to remove the chine bone (part of the backbone) in order to bend the roast into the "crown" but not to cut into the meat of the roast (see top photo). A roast trimmed like this will stay juicy and look pretty, too, which is important because a crown roast is all about dramatic presentation. (The timing for the recipe here is based on a roast trimmed this way.) Also, instead of weight, some butchers want to know the number of ribs you'd like. I call for about 16 ribs, which makes for a nice crown.

Don't: Buy a roast with the chine bone still attached. The chine, which runs perpendicular to the ribs, makes carving the roast difficult, so if the chine is left on, butchers usually cut through it between each rib to facilitate carving. The problem is that these cuts often continue too far into the meat, partially dividing each chop (see bottom photo) and making the roast more likely to dry out because more surface area of the meat is exposed.





2 Make the stuffing base

Put the bread on a rimmed baking sheet and let it sit out to dry overnight.

Cook the bacon in a 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally, until just crisp, 5 to 6 minutes. With a slotted spoon, transfer the bacon to a large mixing bowl. Pour off and discard all but about 1 Tbs. of the bacon fat. Add 3 Tbs. of the butter to the skillet and melt over medium heat. Add the onions, fennel, salt, and pepper and cook, stirring occasionally with a wooden spoon, until just softened and lightly browned, 10 to 12 minutes. Transfer to the bowl with the bacon.

Melt the remaining 2 Tbs. butter in the skillet over medium-high heat. Add the apples and cook, tossing or stirring occasionally, until nicely browned on a few sides but still firm, 4 to 6 minutes. Mix the bourbon with the apple cider and 3 Tbs. water. Carefully add it to the pan, scraping with a wooden spoon to loosen the brown bits stuck to the pan. Cook until the deglazing liquid has reduced and coats the apples, about 1 minute. Add the apples to the bowl. Add the marjoram, sage, fennel seeds, and allspice and stir to combine. (The stuffing base can be prepared to this point and refrigerated for up to 12 hours.)



3 Stuff & cook the roast

Let the roast sit out at room temperature for 1 hour. If the stuffing base was refrigerated, let it sit at room temperature, too.

Position a rack in the bottom third of the oven and heat the oven to 500°F. Season the roast all over with salt and pepper. Put the roast on an oiled flat rack set in a roasting pan or heavy-duty rimmed baking sheet. Cover the bones tightly with aluminum foil. Roast the pork for 30 minutes.

Meanwhile, stir the dried bread into the stuffing base. Pour 2 cups of the chicken broth over the mixture and stir to combine. If the bread immediately sucks up the liquid, add the remaining ½ cup broth. The bread should be moist but not soggy. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Take the roast out of the oven and reduce the oven temperature to 325°F. Remove the foil from the bones and loosely fill the center of the roast with stuffing, mounding it half

way up to the top of the bones (don't worry if the roast doesn't hold very much stuffing; just put in as much as you can). Cover the bones and stuffing tightly with aluminum foil. Set a timer for 1 hour and return the roast to the oven. Wrap the remaining stuffing in a double layer of aluminum foil and set aside.

When the timer goes off, put the wrapped stuffing seam side up in the oven next to the roast. Set a timer for 30 minutes.

When the timer goes off, remove the foil from the roast and open the package of stuffing so the top can crisp up. Set a timer for 15 minutes. When it goes off, start checking for doneness: Insert an instant-read thermometer into the meat between two bones without hitting the bones. The roast is done when the thermometer reads 155° F. Check the temperature in two or three places. The total roasting time will be 2½ to 3 hours.

Slide a wide spatula under the roast to keep the stuffing in and transfer it to a carving board or serving platter. Tent loosely with foil and let rest for 30 minutes. Meanwhile, continue to bake the package of stuffing until the top is crisp and then turn off the oven. Leave the stuffing in the oven until ready to serve.

4 Finish the sauce

Shortly before serving, reheat the sauce in a small saucepan over low heat. Remove the sauce from the heat and whisk in the sour cream and vinegar. Season the sauce to taste with salt, pepper, and additional vinegar. Transfer the sauce and the additional stuffing to serving bowls.

5 Plate & serve

Remove the strings from the roast. At the table, carve the roast into chops by cutting between the ribs into the stuffing.

Serve the sauce and additional stuffing on the side.



Beef Tenderloin with Wild Mushroom Stuffing & Port Wine Sauce

Serves eight to ten.

Don't be scared off by the liver in this stuffing. It's really there just to bind the stuffing and add a rich background note; you won't even notice it.

FOR THE SAUCE:

1¼ oz. (2½ Tbs.) unsalted butter
1 large shallot, finely chopped
(about ¼ cup)
One 750 ml bottle tawny port
(about 3¼ cups)
2 sprigs fresh thyme
2½ cups low-salt chicken broth
1 oz. dried porcini mushrooms
2 tsp. all-purpose flour
1 tsp. good-quality balsamic vinegar;
more to taste
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

FOR THE STUFFING:

1 Tbs. dried currants
2 Tbs. canola oil
1 small chicken liver, fat trimmed
and lobes separated (1½ to 2 oz.)
½ lb. mixed fresh shiitake, oyster,
and hen-of-the-woods mushrooms,
stemmed and sliced ¼ inch thick
(use all 3 varieties if you can find
them; otherwise, try to use at least 2)
1 tsp. kosher salt; more to taste
¼ tsp. freshly ground black pepper;
more to taste
1 small shallot, finely chopped
(a heaping 1 Tbs.)
2 medium cloves garlic, finely chopped
(about 2 tsp.)
¼ cup low-salt chicken broth
1 oz. (2 Tbs.) unsalted butter, cut
into 4 pieces and softened at
room temperature
1 Tbs. chopped fresh parsley
1½ tsp. Cognac or Armagnac
1 tsp. fresh lemon juice
½ tsp. chopped fresh thyme
¼ tsp. finely grated lemon zest

FOR THE ROAST:

4-lb. beef tenderloin roast, preferably
center-cut (see sidebar opposite for
more information)
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

Follow steps 1 through 5, starting at right.



1 Make the sauce reduction

Melt 1 Tbs. of the butter in a 3- to 4-quart (preferably 8-inch-wide) saucepan over medium-low heat. Add the shallot and cook until softened, about 5 minutes. Add the port and the thyme sprigs and bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce the heat to maintain a brisk simmer and cook until the port has reduced to a syrupy texture, about 30 minutes—you should have about ½ cup including the shallot.

Meanwhile, bring the chicken broth to a simmer in a small saucepan. Off the heat, add the porcini and let them soak for 15 minutes. With a slotted spoon, transfer the porcini to a small bowl. Strain the soaking liquid through a fine sieve lined with a paper towel or coffee filter.

Add the soaking liquid and half of the porcini (about ½ cup) to the port reduction (save the remaining porcini for the stuffing). Bring the sauce to a boil over high heat. Reduce the heat to maintain a brisk simmer and cook until it has reduced to 1½ cups, about 15 minutes. Strain the sauce through a fine strainer, pressing on the solids. You should have about 1 cup sauce. Set aside until the roast is done. (The sauce can be made to this point and refrigerated up to 2 days ahead. If not making the stuffing ahead, refrigerate the remaining soaked porcini separately.)

wine pick

A hearty red wine with developed tannins, a mineral undertone, and bright fruit pairs well with the earthy-mushroom and port elements of the beef tenderloin. The Waterstone 2004 Cabernet Sauvignon from Napa Valley (\$29) would be perfect.

2 Make the stuffing

Soak the currants in hot water for 10 minutes. Drain and put them in a food processor. Add the reserved soaked porcini. Heat 1 Tbs. of the oil in a 10-inch skillet over medium heat. Pat the chicken liver dry and cook on both sides until browned on the outside and just a little pink inside, 3 to 4 minutes total. Transfer to a plate, let cool slightly, and then add to the food processor. Process until finely chopped.

Heat the remaining 1 Tbs. oil in the skillet over medium-high heat. Add the mushrooms, salt, and pepper. Cook, stirring occasionally, until they look wilted and shrunken, 2 to 3 minutes. Add the shallot and garlic and continue to cook, stirring, until the mushrooms are tender and beginning to brown, 3 to 4 more minutes. Add the chicken broth and scrape the bottom of the pan with a wooden spoon to loosen any brown bits. If the liquid doesn't evaporate right away, boil until it does. Remove the pan from the heat and let cool slightly.

Add the sautéed mushrooms, butter, parsley, Cognac or Armagnac, lemon juice, thyme, and lemon zest to the liver mixture in the food processor. Pulse to form a chunky paste and season to taste with additional salt and pepper. Scrape the stuffing onto a large piece of plastic wrap and shape it into a log a few inches longer than the roast. Tightly roll the stuffing up in the plastic wrap and twist the ends to form a very tight log. Twisting the ends of the plastic will compress the stuffing so that it's just a bit shorter than the roast. Freeze until firm, about 2 hours and up to 2 days.



3 Stuff & cook the roast

Trim the silverskin and excess fat from the tenderloin. Butterfly the tenderloin by slicing it lengthwise almost but not completely in half, so that you can open it like a book. Unwrap the stuffing and center it along one half of the roast. Fold the roast back up to its original shape and tie at 1- to 2-inch intervals with butcher's twine. (The roast can be stuffed and refrigerated up to 1 day in advance.)

Let the roast sit at room temperature for 1 hour (2 hours if the stuffing is frozen solid). Position a rack in the bottom third of the oven and heat the oven to 500°F. Let the remaining 1½ Tbs. butter for the sauce soften at room temperature.

Season the roast generously with salt and pepper and put it on a flat rack set in a roasting pan or heavy-duty rimmed baking sheet. Roast for 15 minutes and then reduce the oven temperature to 325°F. Continue to roast the beef until a meat thermometer inserted into the center of the meat (not the stuffing) registers 125°F for rare or 130°F for medium rare, 30 to 45 minutes more. Move the roast to a carving board and let it rest, loosely tented with foil, for 15 minutes.

4 Finish the sauce

While the roast rests, bring the sauce to a simmer in a small saucepan over medium-low heat. Mix the softened butter with the flour to form a paste and whisk it into the sauce. Simmer the sauce to thicken slightly and cook off any raw flour taste, about 3 minutes. Whisk in the vinegar. Season to taste with salt, pepper, and additional vinegar.



5 Plate & serve

Remove the strings from the roast and slice it into 8 to 10 medallions. Put a medallion on each plate and drizzle the sauce around the beef.

Buying a beef tenderloin

Beef tenderloin is a widely available cut of meat. Try to get a center-cut piece (often referred to as a Châteaubriand) because it's evenly thick from end to end, which makes for easy stuffing and even cooking. However, a 4-pound center-cut piece comes from a very large tenderloin, which can be hard to find. If you have this problem, then it's fine to use the butt end (the fatter end) of the tenderloin. Just note that there's another piece of meat attached to the side of the butt end, so when you're butterflying the meat, cut through this extra piece first and then into the longer tenderloin piece (see top left photo).

Make sure to tell your butcher that you don't need your roast tied, and ask him to remove the "chain"—a slender, fatty piece of meat that runs along the entire side of the tenderloin. A good butcher should sell you a solid, nicely trimmed piece of meat without any gouges or slashes; the tenderloin is a pricey cut, so don't settle for a piece that's not in good condition.

Allison Ebri Kreidler is Fine Cooking's test kitchen associate and food stylist. ♦

Crispy Potato Pancakes

A chef shares her tricks for making this classic holiday side—and a few great ways to jazz it up

BY ARLENE JACOBS

During the frosty Montreal winters of my childhood, I'd often come home to find my mother at the stove frying up a batch of potato pancakes. The aromas and gentle sizzling sounds rising from the pan were always familiar and soothing. These pancakes, which some of you might know as "latkes," are a traditional food for Hanukkah, the Jewish festival of lights. After years of trial and error, our family recipe has been perfected and lovingly passed along from generation to generation.

The pancakes are easy to make—you whip up a batter with grated potatoes and a few other ingredients and then pan-fry it in spoonfuls. When properly prepared, the finished pancakes are crisp around the edges and soft and chewy in the center, and eating them is sheer pleasure. But there are a few tricks to getting them right, so if you've never made potato pancakes before, look to the following guidelines to help get you started.

Use starchy potatoes, like russets. The starch acts like glue, helping hold the pancakes together. Plus, starchy potatoes have a lower water content than waxy potatoes—and less water means a crispier pancake.

Grate the potatoes in a food processor. Before food processors were invented, cooks grated the potatoes on a box grater. This was tedious and often caused unpleasant knuckle scraping. Fortunately, a food processor can do the grating much faster.

Next, you'll salt the potatoes, which both seasons and draws water from them (this helps the pancakes brown when frying). Then return the potatoes to the food processor, process them until finely minced, and combine them with a few other ingredients to create a batter: egg and flour, which are both good binders, baking powder for lightness, a little oil for richness, and salt and pepper to season.

Fry only a few pancakes at a time in a 10-inch skillet. Limit the number of pancakes in the pan to three or four, so you can turn them quickly as soon as they're golden. I like to use a flexible slotted metal spatula for turning the pancakes, because it slides under them easily and lets the oil drain from them. As you finish each batch, transfer the pancakes to a baking sheet in a low oven while you fry the rest. (For more frying tips, see the sidebar at right.)

Once you've got the basic technique, you can create your own flavor or size variations. Such variations are by no means traditional, but potatoes are so versatile that it's fun to give the pancakes a twist. Try adding herbs or spices to the batter or changing the size of the pancakes. One of my favorite ways to vary the classic recipe is to "stuff" the pancakes with different fillings, as in the recipe for Potato Pancakes Stuffed with Duxelles on p. 54. For more ideas, see the sidebar on p. 55.



Frying right

Pan-frying these pancakes is a snap, but a few helpful tips can ensure the best—and crispiest—results.

- ❖ For an even, golden color, add enough oil to maintain a 1/8-inch depth before cooking each new batch, and wait a minute for it to come up to temperature.
- ❖ Don't crowd the pancakes in the pan, or they'll run together. Also, too much batter in the pan will drop the oil's temperature.
- ❖ For extra-crisp pancakes, press on them with a spatula several times during cooking. You'll get thinner pancakes with less-chewy insides.
- ❖ After a few batches, you'll see bits of potato batter accumulating in the oil. If they look like they're burning, clean the oil by passing it through a strainer into a clean bowl. Wipe out the skillet with a paper towel and return the clean oil to the skillet.



Classic Potato Pancakes (Latkes)

Yields 18 to 20 pancakes.

**2½ lb. russet (Idaho) potatoes (4 medium),
peeled, cut in quarters lengthwise, and
reserved in cold water**
2½ tsp. kosher salt; more to taste
About ¾ cup corn oil
1 medium yellow onion, diced (about 1¼ cups)
1 large egg
2 Tbs. all-purpose flour
1 tsp. baking powder
⅛ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
**Sour cream and applesauce, for serving
(optional)**

Heat the oven to 250°F.

Set a colander in the sink. Grate the potatoes in a food processor fitted with a medium (4 mm) grating disc. Transfer them to the colander and sprinkle with 2 tsp. of the salt. Toss and let drain for 10 minutes, tossing occasionally.

Meanwhile, replace the processor's grating disc with the chopping blade. Add 1 Tbs.

of the oil and the onion, egg, flour, baking powder, pepper, and the remaining ½ tsp. salt to the food processor bowl.

In batches, squeeze the liquid from the shredded potatoes with your hands. Put the potatoes in the food processor with the other ingredients and process for 10 seconds. Stop the machine, scrape the bowl with a rubber spatula, and process until the mixture is finely chopped, 10 to 15 seconds more. Transfer the mixture to a large bowl.

Have ready a large plate lined with paper towels. In a 10-inch skillet, heat ⅛ inch of the remaining oil over medium heat until the surface of the oil shimmers very slightly. With a soup spoon, carefully ladle four mounds of the potato mixture into the oil and spread them slightly with the back of the spoon until they are about 3½ inches in diameter. (The oil should be bubbling gently around the pancakes.) Cook until the pancakes are a deep golden color, 2 to 3 minutes. Lift the pancakes with a slotted metal spatula and

carefully turn them over. Continue to cook until the second side is a deep golden color, about 2 minutes more. Using the spatula, transfer the pancakes to the paper-towel-lined plate and blot well with more paper towels. Sprinkle lightly with salt. Use the spatula to transfer the pancakes to a baking sheet; keep them warm in the oven while you finish the rest. Continue to add oil between batches as needed to maintain the ⅛-inch level of the oil. Serve with the sour cream and applesauce on the side, if using.

Making them ahead

If you're preparing several batches for a crowd, fry the pancakes, let them cool, and freeze them on baking sheets. Once they're frozen, transfer them to freezer bags. You can reheat the pancakes on rimmed baking sheets in a 350°F oven for 10 to 15 minutes.

Potato Pancakes Stuffed with Duxelles

Yields 9 to 10 pancakes.

2½ lb. russet (Idaho) potatoes
(4 medium), peeled, cut in quarters
lengthwise and reserved in cold water
2½ tsp. kosher salt; more to taste
About ¾ cup corn oil
1 medium yellow onion, diced
(about 1¼ cups)
1 large egg
2 Tbs. all-purpose flour
1 tsp. baking powder
½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
1 recipe Duxelles (see below)
2 Tbs. thinly sliced fresh chives

Heat the oven to 250°F.

Set a colander in the sink. Grate the potatoes in a food processor fitted with a medium (4 mm) grating disc. Transfer the potatoes to the colander and sprinkle with 2 tsp. of the salt. Toss and let the potatoes drain for 10 minutes, tossing occasionally.

Meanwhile, replace the processor's grating disc with the chopping blade. Add 1 Tbs. of the oil and the onion, egg, flour, baking powder, pepper, and the remaining ½ tsp. salt to the food processor bowl.

In batches, squeeze the liquid from the shredded potatoes with your hands. Put the potatoes in the food processor

with the other ingredients and process for 10 seconds. Stop the machine, scrape the bowl with a rubber spatula, and process until the mixture is finely chopped, 10 to 15 seconds more. Transfer the mixture to a large bowl.

Have ready a large plate lined with paper towels. In a 10-inch skillet, heat ⅛ inch of the remaining oil over medium heat until the surface of the oil shimmers very slightly. With a soup spoon, carefully ladle three or four mounds of the potato mixture into the oil and spread them slightly with the back of the spoon until they are about 3½ inches in diameter. (The oil should be bubbling gently around the pancakes.) On top of each pancake, drop a heaping spoonful of the duxelles and flatten slightly. Top with an additional spoonful of the potato mixture and flatten gently once again. With the tip of your spatula, gently coax the sides of the tops and bottoms of the pancakes together.

Cook until the pancakes are a deep golden color, 2 to 3 minutes. Lift the pancakes with a slotted metal spatula and carefully turn them over. Continue to cook until the second side is a deep golden color, about 2 minutes more. Using the spatula, transfer the pancakes

Stuffing the pancakes,

1 Drop a spoonful of the duxelles on top of each pancake and use the spoon to flatten slightly.



to the paper-towel-lined plate and blot well with more paper towels. Sprinkle lightly with salt. Use the spatula to transfer the pancakes to a baking sheet; keep them warm in the oven while you finish the rest. Continue to add oil between batches as needed to maintain the ⅛-inch level of the oil. Serve the pancakes sprinkled with the chives.



Duxelles

Yields about ¾ cup.

Duxelles is a mixture of finely chopped mushrooms, shallots, and sometimes herbs that is cooked slowly in butter until it becomes thick.

6 oz. white button mushrooms, cleaned and thinly sliced (about 2 cups)
10 oz. shiitake mushrooms, stems removed and discarded, caps cleaned and thinly sliced (about 3 cups)
2 large shallots, peeled and thinly sliced
4 Tbs. unsalted butter
¾ tsp. kosher salt
½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper

Put the mushrooms and shallots in a food processor fitted with the chopping blade. Pulse until finely chopped. The mushrooms and shallots should be in about ⅛-inch pieces—don't overprocess.

Melt the butter in a 10-inch skillet over medium heat. Add the mushroom mixture, salt, and pepper and cook, stirring. When the mushrooms begin to release their moisture, turn the heat to low and cook, stirring occasionally, until the liquid has evaporated and the duxelles look dry, 20 to 25 minutes. Let cool.

Mushrooms are 90% water; the long, slow cooking of duxelles will evaporate the water and concentrate the mushroom flavor. Save any leftover duxelles in the freezer—it's great in omelets, stuffed under the skin of a roasted chicken, or stuffed in baby squash or cherry tomatoes.

step by step

2 Top the duxelles with an additional spoonful of the potato mixture and flatten once again.



3 Use the tip of your spatula to coax the tops and bottoms of the pancakes together.



Give potato pancakes a twist

Though it's nontraditional, you can easily give a new spin to potato pancakes by varying their flavor or size. Once you've mastered the basic cooking technique, try one of the ideas below, or come up with your own version.

Serve oversize stuffed potato pancakes with a salad for a terrific lunch. Follow the stuffed potato pancake recipe at left but form larger pancakes.

Try other stuffings, like shredded Gruyère and caramelized onions, goat cheese and fresh herbs, prosciutto and shredded Fontina, or ratatouille.


Add chopped fresh herbs like thyme, rosemary, tarragon, chives, or dill (or a mix) to the potato mixture before frying (2 to 3 Tbs. per recipe). Add the herbs toward the end of processing the potatoes; too much chopping can mute the herbs' flavor.

Spice them up. Add ½ tsp. curry or chili powder, 1 clove of finely minced garlic, or ½ tsp. caraway, fennel, or celery seed to the potato batter before frying.

Top the pancakes with a finishing touch. I love them topped with smoked salmon or salmon caviar with a dollop of sour cream and sliced chives.

Make them mini and serve them as a passed hors d'oeuvre, along with sour cream and applesauce.

Arlene Jacobs is a restaurant consultant, recipe developer, food writer, and teacher. ♦



Sprouting Up

Bring out the fresh, nutty flavor of Brussels sprouts by roasting, braising, or sautéing

BY MARTHA HOLMBERG

No one is indifferent about Brussels sprouts—people either love them or hate them. Those in the “hate ‘em” camp undoubtedly adopted that attitude after eating overcooked, cabbagey versions during childhood. (I’ve tasted a few sprouts that way myself, so I can’t blame the haters.) A subset of non-sprout-lovers has had the opposite problem—undercooked Brussels sprouts. I’ve noticed that lots of chefs focus too much on the sprouts’ leaves and lovely color and not enough on cooking them all the way through.

So the problem with Brussels sprouts is, paradoxically, overcooking and undercooking. Which is understandable, because a nice fresh sprout is a tight little ball of densely layered leaves. With most cooking methods, the outer layers will indeed be overcooked by the time the heart is tender.

The trick to cooking sprouts perfectly is to deal with their density. To maximize their nuttiness and downplay their membership in the cabbage clan, it’s best to cut sprouts into the size and shape that works best with your cooking method. I find that quartered sprouts work best for roasting, slices are ideal for braising, and shredded sprouts make a delicious sauté. Cutting the sprouts also lets them better integrate other flavors; great matches include butter, nuts, onions, shallots, bacon, fresh herbs, and citrus.

No matter how you decide to cut, cook, and flavor your sprouts, they’ll need their ends trimmed first with a sharp paring knife. Then be sure to pull off any tough-looking, damaged, or yellow leaves to expose the prettier surface below.

Photos: Scott Phillips



roast



quarters are best for roasting. The oven's heat penetrates the quarters well; plus, they have a lot of surface area to come in contact with the roasting pan, so they get browned for deeper flavor.

Roasted Brussels Sprouts with Dijon, Walnuts & Crisp Crumbs

Serves six to eight.

The mustard-Worcestershire seasoning is a tangy counterpoint to the sprouts, which—despite people's remembrances from childhood—are essentially sweet and nutty. You can fry the crumb topping up to 2 hours before serving.

¼ cup plus 1 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
2 Tbs. Dijon mustard
1 tsp. Worcestershire sauce
½ tsp. caraway seeds, toasted lightly and crushed
¾ tsp. kosher salt; more to taste
Freshly ground black pepper
2 lb. Brussels sprouts, ends trimmed, cut through the core into quarters
1 Tbs. unsalted butter
1 cup coarse fresh breadcrumbs
½ cup chopped walnuts

Position racks in the top and bottom thirds of the oven and heat the oven to 400°F. Line two rimmed baking sheets with parchment.

In a large bowl, whisk ¼ cup of the olive oil with the mustard, Worcestershire sauce, caraway seeds, ½ tsp. of the salt, and about 10 grinds of pepper.

Add the Brussels sprouts and toss to thoroughly distribute the mustard mixture. Spread the sprouts in an even layer on the two baking sheets.

Roast until the cores of the sprouts are just barely tender and the leaves are browning and crisping a bit, 20 to 25 minutes (if your oven heat is uneven, rotate the pans midway through cooking).

While the sprouts are roasting, make the topping: Line a plate with two layers of paper towel. Heat the remaining 1 Tbs. oil with the butter in a medium (10-inch) skillet over medium-high heat. When the butter has stopped foaming, add the breadcrumbs all at once; toss to coat with the fat. Reduce the heat to medium, add the walnuts and the remaining ¼ tsp. salt, and cook, stirring constantly, until the crumbs are browned and slightly crisp and the nuts are golden, 4 to 6 minutes. (The crumbs will start to sound "scratchy" as they get crisp.) Dump the breadcrumb mixture onto the paper towels to drain the excess fat.

Transfer the sprouts to a serving bowl and season to taste with salt and pepper if necessary. Sprinkle the crumbs over the sprouts just before serving.

Sautéed Shredded Brussels Sprouts with Fresh Herbs & Crisp Shallots

Serves six.

You can fry the shallots several hours ahead, but don't top the sprouts with them until moments before serving, so the shallots stay crunchy.

FOR THE SHALLOTS:

3 to 4 cups vegetable oil, for frying
5 to 6 oz. shallots (5 to 6 medium),
peeled and cut into 1/16-inch-thick
rounds and separated into rings
Kosher salt

FOR THE SPROUTS:

1 1/2 lb. Brussels sprouts
2 Tbs. vegetable oil
Kosher salt and freshly ground
black pepper
1 small clove garlic, minced
2/3 cup low-salt chicken broth or water
1 Tbs. unsalted butter
2 Tbs. chopped mixed fresh herbs (I like
tarragon, parsley, and chives)

Fry the shallots: Arrange a double layer of paper towels on two plates for draining the shallots. Pour about 3/4 inch of oil into a 3-quart saucepan and attach a candy thermometer to the side of the pan. Heat over medium-high heat until the thermometer reads 350°F. (It's important to use a deep pan and fairly shallow oil so there's no danger of the oil boiling over as you fry.) Add about a quarter of the shallots and fry, stirring almost constantly with a slotted metal spoon or a skimmer, until pale brown (the color of a brown grocery bag—any darker and the shallots will be bitter), about 60 seconds. With the slotted spoon, quickly scoop out the shallots and drain on the first plate of paper towels. They'll crisp up as they cool. Repeat with the remaining shallots in three more batches, transferring each batch to the first plate when done. Allow the oil to return to 350°F before each batch. If burned bits accumulate in the oil, scoop them out before adding a new batch.

Transfer all the fried shallots to the second plate so they can drain on fresh paper. Season generously with salt and set aside. (The fried shallots may be prepared several hours ahead. Once cool, transfer to an airtight container.)



Shred and cook the sprouts: Trim each sprout and cut in half through the core. Set a half (cut side down) securely on the cutting board and with a sharp knife, cut it into crosswise slices. Start at the core end and slice quite finely (1/16 to 1/8 inch), because the core is very dense. As you move toward the top of the sprout, make your slices wider (1/4 inch). Transfer the cut sprouts to a bowl, tossing them a few times to encourage the leaf sections to separate.

In a large (12-inch) skillet, heat the oil over high heat until very hot. Add the sprouts and toss with tongs to coat with oil (don't worry if the skillet seems full; the sprouts will wilt). Season generously with salt and pepper. Reduce the heat to medium high and cook the sprouts, tossing frequently, until they wilt and brown slightly, 3 to 5 minutes. Add the garlic and toss to distribute. Pour in the broth and continue to cook until the sprouts are just tender and the liquid has evaporated, another 3 to 5 minutes. Remove from the heat, toss with the butter and half of the herbs. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Pile the sprouts into a bowl, sprinkle with the remaining herbs and top with all of the fried shallots; serve immediately.



shredding is perfect for a quick, high-heat sauté. This cutting method gives you the "leafiest" texture because most of the shreds aren't attached to the core, so they can separate and fluff up.

Find a recipe for Brussels sprouts with brown butter and lemon at finecooking.com

Brussels Sprouts Braised with Pancetta, Shallot, Thyme & Lemon

Serves six to eight.

¼ lb. pancetta, cut into ¼-inch dice
(about ½ cup)

1 Tbs. olive oil

½ cup small-diced carrot (2 small)

⅓ cup minced shallot (2 to 3 medium)

⅛ tsp. crushed red pepper flakes

2 lb. Brussels sprouts, trimmed, cut
lengthwise through the core into
¼-inch-thick slices

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

14-oz. can low-salt chicken broth

1 bushy 3-inch sprig fresh thyme

2 Tbs. chopped oil-packed sun-dried tomato

1 Tbs. unsalted butter

1 tsp. lightly packed finely grated lemon zest

In a 12-inch skillet over medium heat, cook the pancetta in the olive oil, stirring frequently, until the pancetta has rendered much of its fat and is nicely browned, 4 to 5 minutes. Increase the heat to medium high, stir in the carrot, shallot, and red pepper flakes and cook to soften the vegetables, 1 to 2 minutes. Add the sprouts, season lightly with salt and pepper, stir to coat with the fat, and cook, stirring, until the sprouts wilt slightly and a few brown lightly, 2 to 3 minutes.

Add the broth and thyme, cover with the lid slightly ajar, and adjust the heat to a lively simmer. Cook the sprouts until they're just barely tender, 4 to 6 minutes. Remove the lid, increase the heat to medium high and cook, stirring frequently, until all the liquid has evaporated and the sprouts are quite tender (but not mushy), about 3 minutes. Off the heat, gently stir in the sun-dried tomato, butter, and lemon zest. Season to taste with salt and pepper.



braise



slicing is great for braising. The liquid surrounds the sprouts and cooks them evenly and relatively quickly, and the flavors of the braising liquid and other ingredients integrate deliciously with the slices.

Selecting and storing sprouts

Brussels sprouts are a cool-weather vegetable, growing best in areas with sunny days and cool, foggy nights. Sprouts may get a bad rap in some quarters, but growers certainly think of sprouts as a noble vegetable, giving them names like Valiant and Prince Marvel (though I also found a variety called Bubbles). The best specimens have seen some frost, which intensifies their

sweetness. Look for sprouts from early fall through spring, and choose tight heads with little decay or yellowing, though most sprouts will have a few outer leaves that aren't perfect. You'll often see sprouts whose outer leaves have been munched by insects, but that doesn't seem to affect the quality of the inner sprout. Sprouts that are loose and ruffy have most likely been

grown in too much heat. Their flavor won't be as intensely sweet and nutty, and their leaves will dry out more quickly, so those aren't your best choice.

If you're lucky, you can find the whole stalk, which is gorgeous in a sculptural way but a pain to store once you get it home. I often buy them on the stalk at the farmers' market and then admire them on the counter

for a while before I cut off the sprouts and put them in a plastic bag in the crisper drawer. I've had good luck storing sprouts in the fridge for up to a couple of weeks; keep them in the coldest part and be sure they're not too moist or they'll get moldy. The longer they're stored, the more the outer leaves will yellow, so just peel them off before cooking.

Martha Holmberg, the former publisher of Fine Cooking, is the food editor of The Oregonian newspaper in Portland. ♦

Move Over, Gingerbread Man

Spice up the season with four amazing desserts inspired by the most familiar of holiday flavors

BY JULIA M. USHER

If you're like me, the slightest hint of the holidays brings back a flood of food memories. My favorite is a steaming loaf of gingerbread fresh from the oven and slathered with whipped cream—just like the one my great-grandmother used to bake. But as much as I crave gingerbread's familiar flavor and the warm, fuzzy feelings it stirs up, I often find myself growing weary of loaves and cutout cookies long before Saint Nick arrives on Christmas Eve.

So what do I do to spice things up? I take other popular desserts and infuse them with the holiday spirit using gingerbread's defining ingredients: molasses and the spice trio of ginger, cinnamon, and cloves. For the holiday sweets in these pages, I sifted through my recipe files and selected des-

serts with the same rustic simplicity that had endeared me to gingerbread in the first place and then gave them a gingerbread twist. So, for example, my pear cobbler has a gingerbread biscuit topping that adds an element of surprise to this classic crowd-pleaser. I drizzle a luscious eggnog crème anglaise over a moist steamed coriander-gingerbread cake, and I make a creamy cheesecake doubly delicious by adding molasses and spices in both the gingersnap crust and the filling. (Cheesecake, by the way, is a real boon during the holiday rush because it has to be made ahead so it can chill overnight.) Finally, a velvety ginger-spice ice cream is an unexpected and delicious treat—especially if you serve it with the cobbler.



Molasses

Gingerbread's defining ingredients



Ground cinnamon



Ground ginger

Ground cloves



Use mild molasses

I use mild molasses—not blackstrap—for these desserts. Blackstrap molasses is intense and somewhat bitter, so I usually reserve it for savory dishes that are a better match for its strength. For more on molasses, see *From Our Test Kitchen*, p. 78.



Gingerbread-Pear Cobbler

Yields one 10x15-inch cobbler; serves twelve to sixteen.

Though best eaten warm from the oven—and even better with whipped cream or ice cream—this cobbler can be made a day ahead.

1 Tbs. softened unsalted butter for the pan

FOR THE PEAR LAYER:

5¼ lb. ripe pears (about 12 medium), peeled, cored, and cut into ½- to ¾-inch-thick slices (Bosc or Anjou pears work well)

¾ cup granulated sugar

2 Tbs. fresh lemon juice (from 1 lemon)

1½ tsp. minced lemon zest (from 1 lemon)

2 Tbs. minced crystallized ginger (about 1 oz.)

1½ Tbs. unbleached all-purpose flour

1 oz. (2 Tbs.) unsalted butter, at room temperature, cut into small pieces

FOR THE GINGERBREAD BISCUIT LAYER:

9 oz. (2 cups) unbleached all-purpose flour

5½ Tbs. granulated sugar

1 Tbs. ground ginger

2½ tsp. baking powder

2 tsp. ground cinnamon

¾ tsp. ground cloves

½ tsp. table salt

¼ tsp. baking soda

3 oz. (6 Tbs.) vegetable shortening
1¼ oz. (2½ Tbs.) unsalted butter, at room temperature

2 large eggs

6 Tbs. whole milk

⅓ cup molasses

¾ tsp. pure vanilla extract

FOR THE TOPPING:

½ cup sliced almonds

2 Tbs. granulated sugar

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 400°F. Lightly butter a 10x15x2-inch baking dish.

Make the pear layer: In a large bowl, gently toss the sliced pears with the sugar, lemon juice, and lemon zest. Make sure the lemon juice completely coats the pears to keep them from browning. Sprinkle the crystallized ginger and flour over the top. Stir until evenly incorporated, breaking apart any ginger pieces that may be stuck together. Spread the pear mixture evenly in the bottom of the prepared pan and dot with the softened butter pieces.

Make the biscuit layer: In a medium bowl, stir the flour, sugar, ginger, baking powder, cinnamon, cloves, salt, and baking soda with a fork. With the fork, work in the shortening and the softened butter until the size of small peas.

In a small bowl, whisk the eggs, milk, molasses, and vanilla extract. Make a well in the center of the dry ingredients and pour the egg mixture into the well. Stir just until the egg mixture is completely blended. Dollop the batter by heaping tablespoonfuls onto the pears to create a cobbled effect, taking care to space the dollops about 1 inch apart. (Though the batter will cover only about half of the pear layer, don't spread it out. It will rise and spread to cover most of the pears as it bakes. If you run out of space to dollop the batter before it's all used, distribute what remains among the existing dollops.)

Apply the topping and bake: Sprinkle the nuts and sugar evenly over the cobbler. Bake until the pears are tender and the topping is golden brown, 35 to 40 minutes. If needed, rotate the pan midway through the baking to allow the top to brown evenly. Let rest at least 20 minutes before serving. Serve warm.

Storing: Once completely cool, wrap the cobbler in plastic and store it at room temperature for up to 24 hours. For longer storage, refrigerate for up to one week. To reheat, remove the plastic, cover loosely with foil, and set in a 300°F oven until warmed through, 20 to 25 minutes.

Steamed Coriander-Gingerbread Cake with Eggnog Crème Anglaise

Yields two 9-inch cakes; each serves eight to ten.

Though the steaming process leaves it deliciously moist straight from the oven, I prefer this cake one or two days later, after the spices have had a chance to meld.

Cooking spray for the cake pans

1 lb., 1 oz. (3¾ cups) unbleached all-purpose flour

1 Tbs. baking soda

1 Tbs. ground ginger

1½ tsp. ground cinnamon

1½ tsp. ground cloves

¼ tsp. table salt

6 oz. (generous 1 cup) pitted dates, chopped into ¼-inch pieces

2 Tbs. plus 1 tsp. whole coriander seeds

6 oz. (12 Tbs.) unsalted butter, at room temperature

¾ cup granulated sugar

1½ cups molasses

3 large eggs, at room temperature

3 oz. (¾ cup) walnut halves, toasted and coarsely chopped

1 recipe Eggnog Crème Anglaise (at right)

Bring a large kettle of water to a boil—you'll need 1½ cups for the cake batter and about 2 quarts for the steaming pan.

Position one rack in the center of the oven and another beneath it in the lowest slot. Set a 10x15x2-inch baking pan or Pyrex dish on the lower rack and fill the pan halfway with boiling water. Heat the oven to 350°F. Lightly coat two 9x2-inch round cake pans with cooking spray and line the bottoms with parchment. Apply another light coat of cooking spray to the parchment.

Prep the ingredients: Sift the flour, baking soda, ginger, cinnamon, cloves, and salt into a large bowl. Stir to combine. Put the chopped dates in a small bowl with 3 Tbs. of the flour mixture. Pull apart any date pieces that may be stuck together and toss to evenly coat with the flour.

Crush the coriander seeds with a mortar and pestle or in a spice grinder. Alternatively, seal the seeds in a zip-top plastic bag and use a rolling pin to crush them finely.

Mix the batter: Put the softened butter in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with a paddle attachment. Cream the butter on medium speed until very soft and smooth. Gradually add the sugar and continue to beat on medium speed until light and fluffy, about 2 minutes. Stop the mixer and scrape down the sides of the bowl with a spatula. Add the molasses and beat again on medium speed just until evenly incorporated. Add the eggs

one at a time, mixing for about 10 seconds after each addition and scraping down the bowl as needed between additions. The batter will look broken.

Measure out 1½ cups boiling water. Turn the mixer to very low speed or, if you prefer, do all remaining mixing by hand. Alternate adding the flour mixture and the boiling water in five additions, beginning and ending with the flour. Mix just until each addition is incorporated, as overmixing will lead to a tougher cake—it's fine if the batter looks slightly lumpy. Stir in the reserved date-flour mixture, crushed coriander seeds, and chopped walnuts. The batter will be quite loose.

Bake the cakes: Divide the batter equally between the two prepared cake pans. Set both pans on the center rack and bake until a toothpick inserted in the center of each cake comes out clean, 40 to 55 minutes. Let the cakes cool in their pans about 10 minutes and then invert them onto cooling racks and peel off the parchment paper. (Allow the water-filled baking pan to cool in the oven until it can be safely moved without spilling hot water.)

Serve the cakes warm or at room temperature. Cut each cake into 8 to 10 slices and serve each piece with 2 to 3 Tbs. of Eggnog Crème Anglaise (see the recipe at right).

Storing: If baking ahead, wrap the cakes tightly in plastic while they are still slightly warm to the touch. (Any trapped steam will condense, adding moisture to the cakes.) Store the cakes up to a week at room temperature. To reheat, remove the plastic, put the cakes on a cookie sheet, and cover them loosely with foil. Heat them in a 300°F oven until warmed through, 15 to 20 minutes.

You can freeze the cakes, wrapped in plastic and then foil, for up to two months.



Eggnog Crème Anglaise

Yields about 2¼ cups, enough sauce for two 9-inch cakes.

Spiked with bourbon, rum, and grated nutmeg, this holiday-inspired cream sauce will quickly get you in the spirit. It thickens to a rich, velvety consistency as it chills, so for the most luxurious texture, make it a day ahead.

2 cups heavy cream
½ cup granulated sugar
4 large egg yolks
⅛ tsp. table salt
1 Tbs. dark rum
1 Tbs. bourbon
1 tsp. freshly grated nutmeg
1 tsp. pure vanilla extract

Set a medium metal bowl in a large bowl of ice water and have a fine sieve at the ready.

Combine the cream and sugar in a 3-quart saucepan. Set the pan over medium heat, stirring occasionally to encourage the sugar to dissolve. Heat the mixture through but do not allow it to boil. Remove from the heat.

Put the egg yolks and salt in a small heatproof bowl and gently whisk to break up the yolks. Gradually whisk in ½ cup of the warm cream mixture. Pour the yolk mixture into the cream remaining in the saucepan and whisk to combine.

Cook over medium-low heat, stirring constantly with a clean wooden or heatproof plastic spoon until the custard thickens slightly, enough to coat the back of the spoon and hold a line drawn through it with a finger, 4 to 8 minutes. An instant-read thermometer should register 170° to 175°F. Do not let the sauce overheat or boil, or it will curdle. Immediately strain the sauce through the sieve into the bowl set in the ice-water bath (see the sidebar, above right).

Gently whisk in the rum, bourbon, nutmeg, and vanilla extract. Stir the sauce occasionally until cool, 20 to 30 minutes. Transfer it to another container, if you like, and cover the surface of the sauce with plastic to prevent a skin from forming. Wrap the container tightly with more plastic and refrigerate a minimum of 2 hours, until velvety and slightly thick.

Storing: The sauce can be stored in the refrigerator in a tightly sealed container for 2 to 3 days. Cover the surface of the sauce with plastic wrap to prevent a skin from forming.

A water bath stops the cooking

Crème anglaise is a delicate, sweet egg-based sauce that's prone to curdling if overheated. So as soon as it begins to thicken, you'll need to stop the cooking by putting the bowl in an ice-water bath. (You'll have to do this when making the ice cream on p. 64 as well.) Be sure to set up the water bath before you start cooking the crème anglaise, so you won't have to scramble at the last minute and take the risk of scrambling your sauce, too.



When it comes to ground spices, freshness is key

Before you bake any of these desserts, check your ground spices for freshness. An old spice can mean the difference between a pleasantly spicy dessert and one that's downright bland.

Grinding whole spices is the best way to ensure that they're fresh. But it can be time-consuming, especially when you're juggling baking with tree-trimming, gift-wrapping, and all the other little tasks of the season. So bottled ground spices are fine if time is short. To make sure they're as fresh as possible when you buy them and that they stay fresh, follow these simple steps:

- ❖ **Inspect the expiration date on spice bottles** and choose those with the most distant dates, ideally six months away or more.
- ❖ **Throw away old spices.** Discard bottled spices if they have been open longer than six months.
- ❖ **Store spices properly.** Though you might be tempted to store spices (ground or whole) in pretty containers above your stovetop, where they're handy, they will stay fresh longer in a cool, dark cabinet or a corner of your refrigerator.

Ginger-Spice Ice Cream

Yields a generous 1 quart; serves eight.

To learn how to make the twisty cookie garnish on the bowls of ice cream below, see From Our Test Kitchen, p. 78.

4 large egg yolks
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup plus 1 Tbs. granulated sugar
 $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups heavy cream
 $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups whole milk
 $1\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. ground ginger
1 tsp. ground cinnamon
 $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. ground cloves
2 Tbs. molasses
1 tsp. pure vanilla extract
Pinch table salt

Set a medium metal bowl in a large bowl of ice water and have a fine sieve at the ready.

Whisk the egg yolks with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of the sugar in a medium heatproof bowl. Combine the remaining $\frac{1}{2}$ cup plus 1 Tbs. sugar with the heavy cream and milk in a 3-quart saucepan. Set over medium heat and stir occasionally until the milk is hot but not simmering. Whisk about $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of the hot milk into the yolks and then whisk the yolk mixture back into the milk.

Reduce the heat to medium low and cook, stirring constantly with a clean wooden spoon or rubber spatula, until you see wisps of steam and the custard thickens slightly, 3 to 4 minutes. An instant-read thermometer should register 170° to 175°F . Don't let the custard overheat or boil, or it will curdle. Immediately strain the custard through the sieve into the bowl set in the ice-water bath to halt the cooking process (see sidebar, p. 63).

Sprinkle the ginger, cinnamon, and cloves over the custard while it's still warm and whisk well to distribute evenly. Wait 10 minutes and then whisk in the molasses, vanilla, and salt. Cover the surface of the custard with plastic to prevent a skin from forming and let it cool to room temperature. Take the bowl out of the water bath and cool thoroughly in the refrigerator (ideally overnight) before freezing.

Stir the chilled custard to evenly distribute any molasses or spices that may have settled to the bottom. Freeze in an ice cream maker according to the manufacturer's instructions. With most ice cream makers, the custard will reach its thickest consistency after churning 30 to 35 minutes. However, the ice cream can still be somewhat soft at this point. If you prefer a firmer consistency, transfer it to a covered storage container and freeze until it reaches the desired consistency.

Storing: Tightly covered, this ice cream will keep fresh and freezer-burn-free for about a week.





Ginger-Molasses Cheesecake

*Yields one 10-inch cheesecake;
serves sixteen to twenty.*

I use gingersnaps from the store because their crunchiness makes them ideal for grinding to a fine crumb. Serve with a sprinkle of candied nuts—pecans would be great.

FOR THE CRUST:

2 cups finely crushed gingersnap cookies
(about 8½ oz.; crush in a food processor
or in a zip-top bag with a rolling pin)
2 Tbs. granulated sugar
2½ oz. (5 Tbs.) unsalted butter, melted; plus
1 tsp. melted butter for the pan

FOR THE GINGER-MOLASSES FILLING:

Five 8-oz. packages cream cheese, at room
temperature
1¾ cups granulated sugar
1 Tbs. unbleached all-purpose flour
1 Tbs. ground ginger
1½ tsp. ground cinnamon
½ tsp. ground cloves
¼ tsp. table salt
4 large eggs, at room temperature
3 large egg yolks, at room temperature
¼ cup molasses
2 Tbs. heavy cream, at room temperature
1 tsp. pure vanilla extract

Position one rack in the center of the oven and another directly beneath it. Heat the oven to 350°F.

Make the crust: Mix the crushed gingersnaps and sugar in a small bowl. Using a fork or your hands, gradually work in the melted

butter, mixing until all the crumbs are moistened. Use your fingers and the bottom of a straight-sided, flat-bottomed metal measuring cup or drinking glass to press the mixture firmly into a 10x3-inch springform pan to create a uniform ⅛- to ¼-inch-thick crust that covers the bottom and goes 1 to 1½ inches up the sides. Bake the crust on the middle oven rack until it's fragrant and warm to the touch, 5 to 7 minutes. Let the pan cool on a rack while you prepare the filling.

Make the filling: Put the softened cream cheese in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with a paddle attachment. Beat on medium speed until very smooth and entirely free of lumps. Gradually add the sugar. Scrape down the sides of the bowl and continue mixing until the sugar has dissolved, 1 to 2 minutes. (Smear a small amount of the mixture between your fingertips; there should be no grittiness if the sugar has dissolved.)

In a small bowl, mix the flour, ginger, cinnamon, cloves, and salt. Sprinkle the mixture evenly over the cream cheese and mix on low speed until blended.

Add the eggs and yolks, one at a time, beating on medium speed until just combined. Scrape down the sides of the bowl after every other addition. (Beat no more than necessary to mix in each egg or you'll incorporate too much air, making the cheesecake dry and porous as opposed to dense and creamy.) Add the molasses, cream, and vanilla and mix until well combined.

Assemble and bake the cheesecake:

Brush the inside rim of the pan above the crust with the remaining 1 tsp. melted butter, without disturbing the crust. Pour the batter into the pan—it should fill the pan to a little above the crust. Put the pan on the middle oven rack and position a foil-lined baking sheet directly beneath it to catch any butter drips. Bake until the top of the cake is golden brown and the center just barely jiggles when the side of the pan is gently tapped, 1 hour and 10 to 20 minutes. It's fine if the cake develops a few cracks on the surface. Turn off the oven, open the door, and let the cheesecake cool in the oven for 15 minutes.

Set the cake on a rack until completely cool, at least 4 hours. Cover the cake loosely with plastic, cut a few air vents in the plastic, and refrigerate it overnight in the pan. When ready to serve, slowly release the pan sides. If any of the cake edge appears stuck, gently loosen it with a sharp paring knife before continuing to release the pan.

For the cleanest servings, use a sharp chef's knife and wipe it clean with a warm, damp cloth between slices.

Storing: Cover the cake loosely with plastic and refrigerate. It's best if eaten within a day or two, as the crust will soften.

Julia M. Usher is a baker, freelance writer, and the former chef/owner of AzucArte, a bakery in St. Louis. ♦

Thai on the Fly

A Quick Curry for Any Night

A simple method gives you a repertoire of comforting, aromatic dishes

BY NANCIE McDERMOTT

When I traveled to Thailand for the first time in 1975, I knew next to nothing about Thai food. It wasn't meant to be a culinary trip after all: I was serving in the Peace Corps, and all I knew was that I wanted to see Asia. But when I got to Thailand there was no escaping the pull of the deeply flavored local cuisine. Thai curries, in particular, captivated me with their heady spiciness and complex harmony of flavors. These rich stews—simmered in broth and, often, coconut milk and finished with a combo of salty, sweet, and hot ingredients like fish sauce, sugar, and fresh chiles—are distinctively flavored with a spicy, powerfully aromatic mix called curry paste (see sidebar on p. 69). They're among the most popular dishes in Thailand, often prepared for special occasions but also savored daily at small curry shops that line busy town streets.

The good news is that you don't have to go to Thailand to eat a good Thai curry. You don't even have to go to a Thai restaurant. Thai curries are easy enough to make at home—even on a busy night—without having to hunt far and wide for exotic ingredients. The four steps at right give you a basic method for making any Thai curry. And while many Thai cooks and restaurants make curry paste from scratch (for a recipe, see p. 83), you can use store-bought curry paste to speed things up, and you can replace traditional ingredients like palm sugar or Thai basil with more readily available ones, like brown sugar and Italian basil. So after one stop at your local supermarket, cooking a fabulous curry takes just about half an hour. It's no surprise that in my house Thai curries are high on the list of go-to weeknight dishes.

A meal in a bowl. Another reason I love making curries on a weeknight is that they're a perfect one-dish supper. With beef, chicken, seafood, or even tofu and a variety of vegeta-

bles, a Thai curry over rice (or noodles) makes a fantastic, satisfying meal.

Not all curries have coconut milk. Thai cooks use coconut milk in many curry dishes, but they also enjoy curries made with just broth. These curries, like the one at right, are called “country-style” or “jungle” curries because they're rustic and simple enough to make anywhere, anytime, using just meat, vegetables, curry paste, and broth or water. (In Thailand, skipping the coconut milk makes things a lot easier because home cooks make it from scratch, painstakingly squeezing grated coconut flesh.) Because no coconut milk is added to thicken the broth, these curries have the texture of hearty soups rather than stews.



1 Heat a little vegetable oil, add the curry paste, and stir, pressing the paste against the bottom of the pan. This will coat it with hot oil and make it “bloom,” releasing complex aromas and flavors.



2 Add meat and vegetables to the pan and stir to coat them with the curry paste. If you're using fish or vegetables that cook quickly, add them later.





Red Country-Style Curry with Beef, Shiitakes & Edamame

Serves four.

When I make this curry with store-bought curry paste and no lime leaves, I like to serve it with lime wedges on the side to squeeze over all.

- 1 lb. flank steak**
- 5 oz. fresh shiitake mushrooms**
- 2 Tbs. vegetable oil**
- 3 Tbs. jarred or homemade red curry paste**
(see recipe, p. 83)
- 2³/₄ cups low-salt chicken broth**
- 5 wild lime leaves, torn or cut into quarters**
(optional)
- 1¹/₂ cups frozen shelled edamame**
(soy beans), thawed
- 3 Tbs. fish sauce**
- 1 Tbs. palm sugar or light brown sugar**
- ¼ tsp. kosher salt; more to taste**
- A handful of fresh Thai or Italian basil leaves**
- Hot cooked rice or rice noodles for serving**
- 1 long, slender fresh red chile (such as red jalapeño or serrano), thinly sliced on the diagonal (optional)**

Slice the beef across the grain ¼ inch thick and then cut the slices into 1½- to 2-inch-long pieces.

Trim and discard the stems from the shiitakes; slice the caps ¼ inch thick (you should have 1½ to 2 cups).

Heat the oil in a 2- to 3-quart saucepan over medium heat until a bit of curry paste just sizzles when added to the pan. Add all the curry paste and cook, pressing and stirring with a wooden spoon or heatproof spatula to soften the paste and mix it in with the oil, until fragrant, about 2 minutes.

Increase the heat to medium high, and add the beef. Spread it in an even single layer and cook undisturbed until it just begins to lose its pink color, about 1 minute. Turn the beef and continue cooking, stirring occasionally to coat it with the curry paste, until most of the beef no longer looks raw, 1 to 2 minutes.

Stir the shiitakes into the beef. Add the chicken broth and stir again. Add half the lime leaves (if using), and bring to a simmer. Simmer gently, stirring occasionally, until the shiitakes are tender and the beef is cooked through, about 5 minutes.

Add the edamame, stir well, and cook for about 1 minute, just to blanch them. Add the fish sauce, sugar, and salt and stir to combine. Remove from the heat. Tear the basil leaves in half (or quarters if they are large), and stir them into the curry, along with the remaining lime leaves (if using). Let rest for 5 minutes to allow the flavors to develop. Season to taste with salt.

Serve hot or warm with rice or noodles, garnished with the chile slices (if using).



3 Pour in the broth and the coconut milk, if using, and simmer to cook the ingredients through and to build flavor.



4 After adding any quick-cooking ingredients, like shrimp, finish with fish sauce, brown sugar, salt, and torn basil leaves.

Red Curry with Shrimp & Sugar Snap Peas

Serves four.

2 Tbs. vegetable oil
2 Tbs. jarred or homemade red curry paste
(see recipe, p. 83)
15-oz. can unsweetened coconut milk
1 cup low-salt chicken broth, fish broth,
or water
1 lb. shrimp (21 to 25 per lb.), peeled and
deveined
2 cups sugar snap peas (7 to 8 oz.),
trimmed
5 wild lime leaves, torn or cut into quarters
(optional)
2 Tbs. fish sauce
1 Tbs. palm sugar or light brown sugar
½ tsp. kosher salt
A handful of fresh Thai or Italian basil
leaves
Hot cooked rice or rice noodles for serving
1 long, slender fresh red chile (such as red
jalapeño or serrano), thinly sliced on the
diagonal (optional)

Heat the oil in a 2- to 3-quart saucepan over medium heat until a bit of curry paste just sizzles when added to the pan. Add all the curry paste and cook, pressing and stirring with a wooden spoon or heatproof spatula to soften the paste and mix it in with the oil, until fragrant, about 2 minutes.

Add the coconut milk and broth and bring to a simmer. Simmer, stirring often, for 5 minutes, allowing the flavors to develop.

Increase the heat to medium high and let the curry come to a strong boil. Add the shrimp, sugar snap peas, and half the lime leaves (if using), and stir well. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the shrimp curl and turn pink, about 2 minutes. Add the fish sauce, sugar, and salt and stir to combine. Remove from the heat.

Tear the basil leaves in half (or quarters if they are large), and stir them into the curry, along with the remaining lime leaves (if using). Let rest for 5 minutes to allow the flavors to develop.

Serve hot or warm with rice or noodles, garnished with the chile slices (if using).



Substitutions are quicker

In these recipes, traditional ingredients like palm sugar and Thai basil can be replaced with easier-to-find items like light brown sugar and Italian basil. Wild lime leaves have no good substitution, though, so leave them out if you can't find them. We made these curries with both traditional ingredients and substitutions and found that the latter still produce delicious results.

reader review

A *Fine Cooking* reader gave the Green Curry with Chicken & Eggplant a real-world test. Here are the results:

I liked the fact that this dish tasted like the curries I get in some of my favorite Thai places. Making the extra effort to get the lime leaves, palm sugar, and Thai basil made the dish fantastic for me. It reminded me that the ingredients really matter. Each flavor was so distinct that it really popped, and each bite held a little different experience as a result. This curry was very good, and it was fast and easy to make.

—John Lagan,
Sandy Hook, Connecticut

Find a recipe for Green Curry
with Cod & Green Beans at
finecooking.com



Green Curry with Chicken & Eggplant

Serves four.

Green curry paste tends to be spicier than red curry paste (see sidebar at right). If you use homemade curry paste, it may be hotter than the jarred paste, depending on the chiles you use. Use 1½ Tbs. if you'd like a slightly milder curry.

- 1 lb. boneless, skinless chicken thighs (4 large)**
- 2 small Japanese eggplants or 2 very small Italian eggplants (about 4 oz. each)**
- 2 Tbs. vegetable oil**
- 1½ to 2 Tbs. jarred or homemade green curry paste (see recipe, p. 83)**
- 15-oz. can unsweetened coconut milk**
- 1 cup low-salt chicken broth**
- 5 wild lime leaves, torn or cut into quarters (optional)**
- 2 Tbs. fish sauce**
- 1 Tbs. palm sugar or light brown sugar**
- ¼ tsp. kosher salt**
- A handful of fresh Thai or Italian basil leaves**
- Hot cooked rice or rice noodles for serving**
- 1 long, slender fresh red chile (such as red jalapeño or serrano), thinly sliced on the diagonal (optional)**

Trim the chicken and cut it into bite-size chunks. Trim the eggplant, cutting away stems and bottoms. Quarter each lengthwise, and then slice crosswise at 1-inch intervals.

Heat the oil in a 2- to 3-quart saucepan over medium heat until a bit of curry paste

just sizzles when added to the pan. Add all the curry paste and cook, pressing and stirring with a wooden spoon or heatproof spatula to soften the paste and mix it in with the oil, until fragrant, about 2 minutes.

Increase the heat to medium high and add the chicken. Spread it in a single layer and cook undisturbed until it starts to brown around the edges, 1 to 2 minutes. Stir and continue cooking until most of the chicken is lightly browned, 1 to 2 minutes.

Add the coconut milk and chicken broth and stir well, scraping the bottom of the pan to release the browned bits. Add the eggplant and half the lime leaves (if using) and bring to a simmer.

Simmer, adjusting the heat as needed and stirring occasionally, until the chicken is completely done and the eggplant is tender, 8 to 10 minutes.

Add the fish sauce, sugar, and salt and stir. Remove from the heat. Tear the basil leaves in half (or quarters if they are large), and stir them into the curry, along with the remaining lime leaves (if using). Let rest for 5 minutes to allow the flavors to develop.

Serve hot or warm with rice or noodles, garnished with the chile slices (if using).

Nancie McDermott is a cooking teacher and cookbook author specializing in Southeast Asian cuisines. ♦

The skinny on curry paste

Curry pastes, an essential ingredient in Thai curries, are intensely flavored combinations of herbs and spices chopped fine and then ground into a thick, sturdy paste. The standard ingredient list includes fresh or dried chiles, lemongrass, galangal, wild lime peel, cilantro root, coriander and cumin seeds, and shrimp paste. (See From Our Test Kitchen, p. 78, for more on some of these ingredients.)

There are two main types of curry paste: red, made with dried hot red chiles that are usually soaked before grinding, and green, made with fresh hot green chiles. While all curry pastes are spicy, the red ones tend to be milder than the green ones. The heat level, however, will vary with the brand of paste you buy, or if you're making your own, with the type of chiles you use (see below).

Buy it or make your own

You can find jarred red and green curry paste in the Asian section of most supermarkets. Store it in the refrigerator for up to two weeks after opening.

Jarred pastes are ideal for busy weeknights, but if you have a little more time, try making curry paste from scratch (see the recipe on p. 83 in From Our Test Kitchen). It'll require a trip to an Asian market for a few ingredients, but it's worth it: Home-made curry paste will give your curries a more complex, nuanced flavor. And what's great is that you can make curry paste on a weekend, refrigerate or freeze it, and use it later to whip up a quick curry.





A Cookie for Every Occasion

TEXT BY LISA WADDLE

RECIPES BY
ABIGAIL JOHNSON DODGE

Dark Chocolate
Crackles

Cardamom-Honey
Cutouts

Rugelach

Vanilla Slice & Bake
Cookies

Macadamia Double-
Decker Brownie Bars

Maple-Walnut Tuiles

Peanut Butter &
Chocolate Sandwiches

Baker Abby Dodge shares her seven favorite cookies for the holidays

Just about everyone I know has a tradition surrounding the making—or at least eating—of certain cookies at this time of year. Inevitably, we all wind up making those familiar recipes that have been handed down through the generations. For me, I feel compelled to make my grandmother's walnut biscotti, though, to be honest, they're not particularly exciting.

This year I decided once and for all to revamp my cookie arsenal, to really find some showstoppers I could make for parties, for gifts, and for the office. As luck would have it, I wound up with a secret weapon in my search for extraordinary cookies: *Fine Cooking's* contributing editor and baking guru Abigail Johnson Dodge. It just so happens that for this December issue, we asked Abby to pull out all the stops and develop seven fabulous cookies, each of which would suit a different occasion or taste. And, wow, did Abby deliver.

"I started by imagining my audience: who was I serving and what would the event be?" Abby said of her strategy. "I thought

about a cookie swap, and I knew I wanted a recipe that would make a big batch, that everyone in the family would love, but that wasn't boring. That's how I came up with the Vanilla Slice & Bake cookies, which can also be spiked with crystallized ginger. They're very different cookies than, say, the Maple Walnut Tuiles, which are a bit more impressive—perfect for a dinner party.

Abby didn't hold back on the ingredients in these cookies, and the flavors are really spectacular because of that. The nuance of a little orange in her Dark Chocolate Crackles really makes the cookie. And her Cardamom Honey Cutouts are nothing like any rolled cookie you've ever made before. And though macadamia nuts are pricey, their rich flavor, along with coconut and cocoa, make Abby's Macadamia Double-Decker Brownie Bars a slam-dunk.

Who knows, one of these cookies may turn out to be your newest cookie tradition, to bake and eat at every holiday. As for me, I think Grandma's biscotti are an endangered species.



When it has to be chocolate

Dark Chocolate Crackles

Yields about 5 dozen cookies.

11¼ oz. (2½ cups) unbleached all-purpose flour
1 tsp. baking soda
¼ tsp. table salt
8 oz. (1 cup) unsalted butter, at room temperature
2 cups firmly packed light brown sugar
2 oz. (⅔ cup) natural, unsweetened cocoa, sifted if lumpy
2 tsp. finely grated orange zest
1 tsp. pure vanilla extract
3 large eggs
8 oz. bittersweet chocolate, melted and cooled until barely warm
¾ cup (4 oz.) chopped chocolate (white, bittersweet, or semisweet)
⅓ cup granulated sugar; more as needed

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Line three large cookie sheets with parchment or nonstick baking liners.

In a medium mixing bowl, whisk together the flour, baking soda, and salt. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment (or in a large mixing bowl with a hand mixer), beat the butter, brown sugar, cocoa, orange zest, and vanilla on medium speed until well combined, about 4 minutes. Add the eggs one at a time, beating briefly between additions. Add the cooled chocolate and mix until blended, about 1 minute. Add the dry ingredients and mix on low speed until almost completely blended, about 1 minute. Add the chopped chocolate and mix until blended, about 15 seconds.

Shape the dough into 1¼-inch balls with a small ice-cream scoop or two tablespoons. (The balls of dough may be frozen for 1 month. Thaw them overnight in the refrigerator before proceeding with the recipe.)

Pour the granulated sugar into a shallow dish. Dip the top of each ball in the sugar and set the balls sugar side up about 1½ inches apart on the prepared cookie sheets. Bake one sheet at a time until the cookies are puffed and cracked on top, 11 to 12 minutes. Let the cookies cool on the sheet for 5 minutes before transferring them to a rack to cool completely.

tip: These cookies are fragile when hot, so be sure to let them cool on the cookie sheet for 5 minutes.

Decorating party

Cardamom-Honey Cutouts

Yields 6 dozen 2½-inch round cookies.

13½ oz. (3 cups) unbleached all-purpose flour; more for rolling
1 tsp. ground cardamom
½ tsp. table salt
¼ tsp. baking soda
8 oz. (1 cup) unsalted butter, at room temperature
¾ cup granulated sugar
¼ cup honey
1 large egg
1 tsp. pure vanilla extract

In a medium mixing bowl, combine the flour, cardamom, salt, and baking soda. Whisk until well blended.

In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment (or in a large mixing bowl with a hand mixer), beat the butter and sugar on medium speed until well blended and slightly fluffy, about 3 minutes. Scrape down the bowl and the beater. Add the honey, egg, and vanilla. Continue mixing on medium speed until well blended, about 1 minute. Add the flour mixture and mix on low speed until the dough is well blended and comes together in moist clumps, 30 to 60 seconds.

Divide the dough roughly in half. On a piece of plastic wrap, shape each dough half into a smooth 5-inch disk. Wrap well in the plastic. Refrigerate until chilled and firm enough to roll out, 1 to 1½ hours. (The dough may be refrigerated for up to 3 days or frozen for 1 month. Thaw overnight in the refrigerator before proceeding with the recipe.)

Bake the cookies: Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Line two or more cookie sheets with parchment or nonstick baking liners. Working with one disk at a time, roll the dough on a floured work surface to about ⅜ inch thick. Dust with additional flour as needed. Choose one or more cookie cutters of any shape that are

about 2½ inches wide and cut out shapes. Arrange the cookies about 1 inch apart on the lined cookie sheets. Gather the scraps and gently press together. Re-roll and cut. Repeat with the remaining dough.

Bake one sheet at a time until the cookies' edges develop a ¼-inch-wide light-brown rim, 11 to 13 minutes (rotate the sheet halfway through baking for even browning). Let the cookies cool on the sheet for about 10 minutes and then transfer them to a rack to cool completely.

For decorating tips and ideas, see From Our Test Kitchen, p. 78)

tip: If you cut the cookies into larger or smaller shapes, you'll need to adjust the baking time. Just be sure to bake until the edges turn light brown.



Hostess gift

Rugelach

Yields about 40 cookies.

These buttery, flaky cookies feature a jewel-like filling of jam and a dusting of chopped pistachios.

FOR THE DOUGH:

10½ oz. (2⅓ cups) unbleached all-purpose flour

¼ cup granulated sugar

½ tsp. table salt

8 oz. (1 cup) cold unsalted butter, cut into 10 pieces

8 oz. cold cream cheese, cut into 10 pieces

FOR THE FILLING:

6 Tbs. raspberry or apricot jam

FOR THE TOPPING:

1 large egg

1 Tbs. water

¼ cup finely chopped salted pistachios (1¼ oz.)

Make the dough: Put the flour, sugar, and salt in a large (11-cup or larger) food processor. Pulse briefly to blend the ingredients. Scatter the butter and cream cheese pieces over the dry ingredients. Pulse until the dough begins to come together in large (about 1-inch) clumps.

Divide the dough into four pieces and on a lightly floured surface, knead each until smooth. Shape each into a flat 6x3-inch rectangle and wrap in plastic wrap. Refrigerate until well chilled, about 1½ hours. (The dough may be refrigerated for up to 3 days or frozen for 1 month before proceeding with the recipe.)

Shape and fill the cookies: Working with one piece of dough at a time, roll the dough on a piece of lightly floured plastic wrap into a rectangle slightly larger than 5 x 13 inches (if refrigerated overnight, let sit at room temperature until pliable enough to roll). Dust with additional flour as needed. Using a sharp knife, trim off the ragged edges to make a 5x13-inch rectangle. Position the dough with one long edge facing you. Using a metal spatula (offset is best), spread evenly with 1½ Tbs. of the jam. Using the plastic wrap as an aid, roll up the dough jelly roll-style beginning with one long side. Wrap in plastic and refrigerate until firm, at least 1 hour. Repeat with remaining dough and jam. (The logs can be wrapped well and frozen for up to 1 month. Thaw overnight in the refrigerator before proceeding with the recipe.)

Top and bake the cookies: Position racks in the top and bottom thirds of the oven

and heat the oven to 350°F. Line two cookie sheets with parchment or nonstick baking liners. In a small bowl, mix the egg and water with a fork until blended.

Unwrap one roll and set on a cutting board. Using a serrated knife and a ruler, cut the roll into 1¼-inch-wide pieces. Arrange cookies seam side down 1 inch apart on the cookie sheets. Repeat with the remaining rolls. Lightly brush the tops with the egg mixture (you won't need it all) and sprinkle with the chopped pistachios. Bake until the rugelach are golden brown, 28 to 30 minutes, swapping the cookie sheets' positions about halfway through. Let cool on the sheets for about 20 minutes. Transfer to a rack to cool completely.

tip: Make a half-batch of dough if your food processor is small.



Cookie Swap

Vanilla Slice & Bake Cookies

Yields about 8 dozen cookies.

15 oz. (3⅓ cups) unbleached all-purpose flour
¾ tsp. baking powder
½ tsp. table salt
9 oz. (18 Tbs.) unsalted butter, at room temperature
1½ cups granulated sugar
1 large egg
1 large egg yolk
1½ tsp. pure vanilla extract

In a medium mixing bowl, combine the flour, baking powder, and salt. Whisk until well blended.

In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment (or in a large mixing bowl with a hand mixer), beat the butter and sugar on medium speed until fluffy and well blended, about 3 minutes. Scrape down the bowl and the beater. Add the egg, egg yolk, and vanilla. Continue mixing on medium until well blended, about 1 minute. Add the flour mixture and mix on low speed until the dough is well blended and forms moist clumps, about 1 minute.

Gently knead the dough by hand in the bowl until smooth. Shape it into two square or round logs, each about 10 inches long, and wrap in plastic wrap. Refrigerate until chilled and very firm, about 4 hours. (The dough may be refrigerated for up to 3 days or frozen for 1 month. Thaw overnight in the refrigerator before proceeding with the recipe.)

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Line two or three cookie sheets with parchment or nonstick baking liners.

Using a thin-bladed, sharp knife and a ruler, mark off ¾-inch-wide slices on the top of the log. Using the same knife, cut straight down to form cookies. Arrange the cookies about 1 inch apart on the lined cookie sheets. Bake one sheet at a time until the cookies' edges are golden

brown, 11 to 13 minutes (for even browning, rotate the sheet after about 5 minutes). Let the cookies cool on the sheet for about 10 minutes and then transfer them to a rack to cool completely.

FLAVOR VARIATION:

Ginger-Spiced

Add to the flour mixture:

¾ cup finely chopped crystallized ginger
2 tsp. ground ginger
1 tsp. ground cinnamon
Pinch of ground black pepper

Note: The crystallized ginger may cause the dough to crumble as you slice the cookies; just press them back together.

tip: For perfectly round cookies, shape the dough into logs, wrap in plastic, and insert into empty paper towel tubes.





Office celebration

Macadamia Double-Decker Brownie Bars

Yields 48 bars.

These gorgeous two-layer bars have a brownie base topped with a gooey nut-and-coconut-studded topping.

FOR THE BROWNIE LAYER:

Cooking spray

6 oz. (12 Tbs.) unsalted butter, cut into large chunks
1½ cups granulated sugar
2¼ oz. (¾ cup) unsweetened cocoa powder (natural or Dutch processed)
¼ tsp. table salt
2 large eggs
1 tsp. pure vanilla extract
3½ oz. (¾ cup) unbleached all-purpose flour

FOR THE MACADAMIA LAYER:

½ cup firmly packed light brown sugar
1½ oz. (⅓ cup) unbleached all-purpose flour
⅔ cup light corn syrup
1½ oz. (3 Tbs.) unsalted butter, melted
1½ tsp. pure vanilla extract
2 large eggs
1½ cups roughly chopped salted macadamia nuts
⅓ cup sweetened coconut flakes

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 325°F. Line the bottom and sides of a 9x13-inch baking pan with foil, leaving some overhang on the sides, and spray with cooking spray.

Make the brownie layer: In a medium saucepan over medium heat, whisk the butter until it is melted. Remove the pan from the heat and add the sugar, cocoa powder, and salt. Whisk until well blended, about 1 minute. Add the eggs and vanilla and whisk until smooth. Add the flour and stir with a rubber spatula until blended. Scrape into the prepared pan and spread evenly. Bake until the top is shiny and dry-looking and the brownie springs back very slightly when pressed with a fingertip, about 20 minutes. (The brownie should not be completely baked.) Remove from the oven and put on a rack.

While the brownie layer is baking, make the macadamia topping: In a large mixing bowl, combine the brown sugar and flour. Whisk until well blended, breaking up any large clumps. Add the corn syrup, melted butter, and vanilla. Whisk until blended, about 1 minute. Add the eggs and whisk just until combined, about 30 seconds. (Don't overmix or the batter will be foamy.) Add the nuts and

tip: Dipping the knife in warm water and wiping it dry between cuts will keep the gooey topping from sticking to the knife.

coconut and stir with a rubber spatula until evenly blended.

Pour the macadamia topping over the warm, partially baked brownie layer. Using a spatula, carefully spread the mixture into an even layer. Return the pan to the oven and bake until the top is golden brown, 37 to 40 minutes. Transfer the pan to a rack to cool completely. (At this point, the entire pan can be wrapped in plastic wrap, then foil, and frozen for up to 1 month.)

Using the foil as handles, lift the rectangle from the pan and invert onto a work surface. Carefully peel away the foil. Flip right side up. Using a sharp knife, cut into 2x2-inch squares and then cut each square into triangles.

Sophisticated dinner party

Maple-Walnut Tuiles

Yields about 20 cookies.

To give them their curved form, the tuiles are draped over a rolling pin when they're hot from the oven. So measure your rolling pin and figure out how many 4-inch cookies you'll be able to drape over it at once. That's how big your batch of cookies should be. But you don't have to shape them if you don't want to—they're just as delicious flat.

Cooking spray (if baking on parchment)

2 large egg whites

¼ cup granulated maple sugar or firmly packed light brown sugar

Pinch table salt

¼ cup pure maple syrup (preferably Grade B)

1½ oz. (3 Tbs.) unsalted butter, melted and cooled slightly

½ tsp. pure vanilla extract

3 oz. (⅔ cup) unbleached all-purpose flour

2 Tbs. finely chopped walnuts

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Line four cookie sheets with nonstick baking liners or parchment paper sprayed with cooking spray. If shaping the tuiles, have a rolling pin at the ready.

In a medium mixing bowl, combine the egg whites, sugar, and salt. Whisk until blended and a bit foamy, about 1 minute. Add the maple syrup, melted butter, and vanilla and whisk until blended. Add the flour and continue to whisk until smooth and blended.

Drop the batter by scant tablespoonfuls onto the prepared cookie sheets, positioning them about 4 inches apart (you should be able to fit 4 to 5 to a cookie sheet, but bake only as many as you can drape over your rolling pin, if you plan to shape them). Spread each round of batter into a 4-inch circle with the back of a spoon (use a circular motion to spread the batter outward from the center.)

Sprinkle about ¼ tsp. of the walnuts over each cookie. Bake until the cookies are browned around the edges and in spots toward the center, 7 to 9 minutes. The cookies will inevitably be slightly uneven and, therefore, will have a few darker-brown spots. Not to worry—they'll still taste good. Don't underbake or the cookies won't be crisp.

Working quickly, move the cookie sheet to a rack. Using a metal spatula, lift off the hot cookies one by one and, if shaping, immediately drape them over the rolling pin. Let cool until set, about 1 minute. Carefully remove the tuiles from the rolling pin and set them on a rack to cool completely. If not shaping, immediately transfer them to a rack.

tip: It's worth seeking out the granulated maple sugar, as it elevates these cookies into something truly special.





To leave out for Santa

Peanut Butter & Chocolate Sandwiches

Yields about 30 sandwich cookies (or 60 single cookies).

These soft, flourless cookies house a bittersweet filling, for a taste combination that appeals to the kid in all of us.

FOR THE PEANUT BUTTER COOKIES:

2½ cups smooth peanut butter, at room temperature

1½ cups firmly packed light brown sugar

1 tsp. baking soda

2 large eggs

2 tsp. pure vanilla extract

FOR THE CHOCOLATE FILLING:

10 oz. bittersweet chocolate, coarsely chopped (about 2 cups)

4 oz. (8 Tbs.) unsalted butter, cut into 4 pieces

Make the cookies: Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Line four cookie sheets with parchment or nonstick baking liners.

In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment (or in a large mixing bowl with a hand mixer), beat the peanut butter, brown sugar, and baking soda on medium speed until well blended, about 1 minute. Add the eggs and vanilla and mix on low speed until just blended, about 25 seconds.

Shape level tablespoonfuls of the dough into balls about 1 inch in diameter. (The balls of dough may be frozen for 1 month. Thaw them overnight in the refrigerator before proceeding with the recipe.) Arrange the balls 1½ inches apart on the prepared baking sheets. Do not press down. Bake one sheet at a time until the cookies are puffed and crackled but still moist-looking, about 11 minutes. Transfer the cookie sheet to a rack to cool about 10 minutes. Using a spatula, move the cookies to the rack and let cool completely. Repeat with the remaining cookies.

Make the filling: Melt the chocolate and the butter in the microwave or in a medium heatproof bowl set in a

tip: Substitute semisweet chocolate for the bittersweet in the filling for a sweeter kick.

skillet with 1 inch of barely simmering water, stirring with a rubber spatula until smooth. Remove from the heat and set aside until cool and slightly thickened, 20 to 30 minutes.

Assemble the sandwiches: Turn half of the cooled cookies over so they are flat side up. Spoon 2 tsp. of the chocolate filling onto the center of each cookie. Top with the remaining cookies, flat side down. Press gently on each cookie to spread the filling almost to the edge. Set on the rack until the filling is firm, 20 to 30 minutes.

Abigail Johnson Dodge, author of The Weekend Baker, is a contributing editor to Fine Cooking. ♦



Molasses

What it all boils down to

The gingerbread desserts on pp. 60–65 owe much of their deep, complex sweetness to molasses. True molasses is a by-product of sugar cane processing. Sugar cane juice is boiled, crystallized, and then centrifuged to separate the crystallized cane sugar from the liquid. That leftover liquid is molasses; it can be refined and processed as is, or it may be boiled up to two more times to produce different grades of sweetness and intensity. Three basic grades exist, but producers use several different terms to refer to them.

Light, mild, Barbados, or robust molasses has been boiled only once. It has a high sugar content and a mild flavor, and it can be used directly on foods as a syrup. Some brands of single-boil molasses haven't even had any sugar removed from them—they're simply refined sugar cane juice

that's been reduced to a syrup. A widely distributed brand of this type is Grandma's Original, and it's what we used to test the gingerbread dessert recipes.

Dark, full, or cooking molasses has been boiled twice. It's slightly bitter and less sweet than single-boil molasses. It's typically used for baking and cooking.

Blackstrap molasses has been boiled three or more times. It has the deepest, most intense flavor of the three. It is generally used for animal feed, although some people prize it for its nutritional value.

The preservative sulphur dioxide is often added to molasses. It alters the flavor somewhat, so use unsulphured molasses when you can.

—Dabney Gough, recipe tester

Molasses	78
Twisty tuile garnish	78
Cooking with bourbon	80
Bourbon balls	80
Nonstick baking liners	81
Making your own curry paste	82
Red curry paste	83
Decorating cookies	84
Royal icing	85

A twist on tuiles

To make the twisty tuile garnish shown with the Ginger-Spice Ice Cream on p. 64, we modified the recipe for Maple-Walnut Tuiles on p. 76. Here's how to do it: First make a stencil from a moisture-resistant paper plate by cutting off its border with scissors so that it can lie flat and then cutting out a 5x1/2-inch rectangle from the center of the plate with scissors or a utility knife.

1 Next, line a baking sheet with parchment or a nonstick baking liner. Have ready a few wooden spoons to shape the tuiles after

they're baked. Lay the stencil on the baking sheet and thinly spread some of the batter over the top of the stencil with a small offset spatula. Lift the stencil and repeat until you've made two tuiles per spoon (depending on handle length, a wooden spoon can usually shape two tuiles, so bake only as many tuiles in a batch as you have spoons to shape them). Don't use the nuts from the tuile recipe. Bake at 350°F until golden brown, 3 to 5 minutes.

2 Remove the pan from the oven and, working very quickly,

drrape the tuiles over the spoon handles and loosely twist them around the handles like candy-cane stripes. Let them sit for 1 minute to set the shape and then slide them off onto a rack to cool completely. If you find that they harden before you can get them twisted, make fewer per batch or try shaping them in the oven (but remember, they'll be hot). Use twisty tuiles not just on ice cream but as a cute garnish for mousses and puddings, too.

—Allison Ehri Kreidler, test kitchen associate



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Cooking with bourbon

When it comes to cooking and baking with liquor, bourbon is one of our favorites. Its smoky caramel and vanilla flavor adds a special nuance to savory and sweet dishes alike. It pairs particularly well with brown sugar, pecans, vanilla, chocolate, mint, apples, pears, peaches, ham, and pork. It's great in sauces, marinades, brines, glazes, cakes, pies, truffles, and cookies. In this issue, it's an important ingredient in the Crown Roast of Pork with Fennel-Apple Stuffing & Cider-Bourbon Sauce on p. 48, in the Eggnog Crème Anglaise on p. 63, and in the Bourbon Balls below.

Bourbon whiskey, which gets its name from Bourbon County, Kentucky, is distilled from a grain mash that's at

least 51% corn (but usually 65% to 80%) and may also contain barley, rye, and sometimes wheat (as in Maker's Mark brand). The distilled liquor is then aged in new charred oak barrels from which it gets its color and smoky, caramelly undertones.

Save expensive single-barrel bourbons like Blanton's or Eagle Rare and small-batch bourbons like Knob Creek or Basil Hayden's for sipping. For cooking, a regular bourbon such as Jim Beam, Wild Turkey, Old Crow, or Heaven Hill is fine.

—A.E.K

Bourbon Balls

Yields 3½ to 4 dozen.

For some of us, it wouldn't be Christmas without these rich, potent treats. I like to make them with chocolate or vanilla cake scraps that I've saved in the freezer, but you can also use a store-bought pound cake, since saving scraps takes some forethought. But if you happen to have scraps, or even a leftover cake layer, here's your chance to use them.

- 1 cup heavy cream**
- ¼ cup bourbon**
- ½ tsp. pure vanilla extract**
- 12 oz. bittersweet chocolate, chopped (about 2½ cups)**
- 8 oz. pecans, toasted and cooled (about 2 cups)**
- 8 oz. plain homemade or store-bought pound cake (thawed if frozen), cut into cubes (about 2½ cups)**
- ⅔ cup cocoa powder, preferably Dutch processed**
- ⅓ cup confectioners' sugar**

In a small saucepan, bring the cream just to a boil over medium-high heat. Remove from the heat and stir in the bourbon and vanilla. Sprinkle the

chocolate evenly over the cream and let sit without stirring for 5 minutes.

Meanwhile, pulse the pecans in a food processor until coarsely chopped. Add the pound cake and pulse until the nuts and cake are finely chopped.

Stir the chocolate and the cream until smooth. Pour the chocolate over the pecan and pound cake mixture in the food processor and pulse until combined. Transfer to a medium bowl and refrigerate, stirring occasionally, until firm enough to scoop, about 1 hour.

Sift the cocoa powder and confectioners' sugar together into a medium bowl. Line a rimmed baking sheet with waxed paper or parchment. Scoop out a heaping tablespoon of the bourbon-chocolate mixture and roll it in your hands to form a ball. Transfer the bourbon ball to the cocoa-sugar mixture, roll it around to coat, and transfer to the baking sheet. Repeat with the remaining bourbon-chocolate mixture. Sift some of the remaining cocoa-sugar mixture over the bourbon balls just to dust them. Refrigerate the bourbon balls until firm, about 2 hours. For a nice presentation, you can put them in mini muffin cups. —A.E.K.



The care & keeping of nonstick baking liners

If you bake lots of cookies, a couple of nonstick silicone baking liners are handy to have because they're reusable and they reduce the need for parchment. Often referred to generically by the name of the leading brand—Silpat (see *Where to Buy It*, p. 90), they rely on their silicone surface to maintain their nonstick quality, so it's important to treat them with care.

To clean a Silpat, wipe it down with a soft, damp sponge and let it air dry. In the test kitchen, we wash it last and drape it over everything else in the dish rack. You may use a diluted solution of mild dishwashing liquid if you like, but remember that an oily feeling on the mat even after cleaning is normal. Silpats are not dishwasher-safe.

Never use knives, scrapers, brushes, or scrubbers on the mats—they will damage the surface.

Store Silpats flat or rolled but not folded. If you store your baking sheets flat, just lay your Silpats in one of them. We store ours by rolling them in paper towels and securing the roll with tape. An empty paper towel tube is another good way to keep them from unrolling.

—D.G



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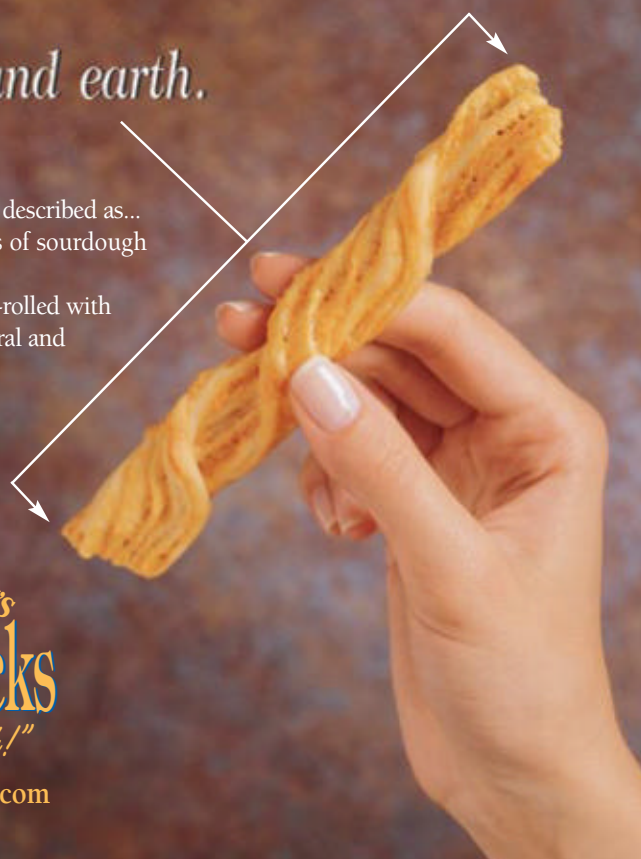
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Homemade Thai curry paste

For many cooks (those not living in Southeast Asia, anyway), the hardest part about making Thai curry paste is finding a few of the ingredients. Some of what you need is waiting for you at your supermarket, but for the ingredients below, you may need to visit an Asian market. If there's not one in your area, see p. 90 for mail-order sources.

A. Lemongrass (tah-krai)

With a floral lemony scent and a delicate citrus-like flavor, lemongrass shows off in a wide array of Thai dishes. It's standard in curry pastes and valued in traditional medicines as well. It's becoming more mainstream, so some supermarkets carry it, but Asian markets are a better bet for the freshest lemongrass. Look for sturdy, fibrous, pale-green stalks.

To use, trim away the top portion of each stalk, leaving a 4-inch-long section,

including the base. Pull off any dry, tired outer leaves before chopping or slicing as needed.

To keep lemongrass fresh, wrap stalks loosely in a plastic bag and refrigerate them for five to seven days. To freeze lemongrass, trim the tops, wrap well to make them airtight, and freeze for up to six weeks. Use directly from the freezer without thawing. Avoid dried and powdered lemongrass, as they retain none of the flavor or aroma you need.

B. Galangal

(kah)

This cousin of ginger is prized for its extraordinary citrus-like flavor in soups and its burst of herbal heat in curry pastes. In its fresh form, its color ranges from delicate ivory to warm brown, depending on its exact variety and age. Round and plump with lots of thumb-like protrusions, it's always encircled with small dark rings along the rounded chunks.

Peel and chop it before grinding with other curry paste ingredients. Store fresh galangal loosely wrapped in plastic in the refrigerator for five to seven days. Or slice it thinly, arrange in a single layer in a zip-top plastic bag, press out the air, seal tightly, and freeze for up to six weeks (use frozen galangal slices without thawing them).

You may also find dried galangal in large, woody-looking slices of wildly varying sizes. These work wonderfully in Thai dishes. Before chopping, soak them in warm water for 20 to 30 minutes or until pliable. Avoid ground galangal powder, as it lacks the intense flavor and aroma of fresh.

C. Shrimp paste (ka-pi)

Profoundly redolent of all things oceanic, shrimp paste is an essential and treasured source of flavor and texture in curry pastes and in *nam prik*, the beloved genre of hot chile dipping sauces. Made from tiny shrimp which are boiled, peeled, salted, dried, and then ground to a fine, sturdy, and very aromatic paste, it ranges in color from purplish-red to brown, with a firm but moist texture. It packs a powerful scent and super-salty flavor, but it melds into curry paste without a trace of its original intensity.

Look for it in small plastic jars and keep it tightly closed until you need it. If it's sealed with a layer of wax, simply break the wax and discard it. Store it at room temperature, tightly sealed, for up to six months.

D. Dried lime peel (*piew mah-kroot*)

Essential in most curry pastes, the intensely aromatic and flavorful dried peel of the wild lime (also known as kaffir lime) delivers the vibrant citrus notes of limes and lemons with amazing depth. Drying sometimes turns the peel from vivid green to dull brown, but the intense flavor remains.

Soak the peel in warm water for about 20 minutes or until it's pliable and chop very finely before grinding with other curry paste ingredients. Store unused peel in an airtight container for up to six months.

You may find frozen whole wild limes as well. Keep them frozen, and cut off strips of peel, including some white pith, as needed without thawing the lime. In place of wild lime, you can substitute lime or lemon zest, using the zest only, without the pith.

E. Cilantro root (*rahk pahk chee*)

Milder in flavor and aroma than their leafy tops, cilantro roots provide a delicate herbal note and a plush, moist texture to curry pastes, bringing pungent ingredients like chiles, garlic, and galangal into a harmonious, flavor-packed whole. Look for cilantro bunches sold with their roots still attached. They may be tiny or up to several inches long. Use the root and about 1 inch of the stem portion attached to each root. Wash well and chop finely before grinding with other curry paste ingredients.

To store, rinse well and put the roots in a jar of water with the leafy tops protruding from the jar. Keep at room temperature for one or two days, or cover loosely with a plastic produce bag and refrigerate for three or four days.

You may also find frozen cilantro root in Asian markets. If you can't find any cilantro root, substitute chopped cilantro stems with a few leaves mixed in.

—Nancie McDermott, contributor

Red Curry Paste

Yields 1 scant cup.

Thai curry paste is traditionally made using a sturdy granite mortar and pestle, but a food processor works fine. This curry paste will have a softer texture than the fudge-textured curry pastes you find in stores because of the water you add to help the blades move.

½ cup small dried hot red chiles
(such as Thai bird chiles or chiles de arbol)

1 large dried red New Mexico chile
(optional)

1 Tbs. coriander seeds

1 tsp. cumin seeds

5 whole black peppercorns

3 stalks fresh lemongrass

¼ cup chopped shallots

2 Tbs. chopped garlic

1 Tbs. chopped fresh or frozen galangal or fresh ginger

1 Tbs. coarsely chopped cilantro root
(root plus about 1 inch of stem) or
chopped cilantro stems and leaves

1 tsp. finely chopped dried wild lime peel (soak in warm water before chopping) or lime zest

1 tsp. kosher salt

1 tsp. shrimp paste (optional)

Open the chiles, breaking off their stems and shaking out and discarding most of their seeds. Break the pods into pieces. (Large chiles will be somewhat pliable, while small ones will be brittle.) Combine the chile pieces in a medium bowl and add warm water to cover them. Set aside to soak for about 30 minutes.

Meanwhile, put the coriander seeds in a small, dry skillet over medium-high heat. Cook, shaking the pan, until they darken to a golden brown color and become fragrant, 2 to 3 minutes. Transfer to a small plate.

Let the skillet cool for a few minutes and then toast the cumin seeds in the same way until nicely browned and fragrant, 1 to 2 minutes. Transfer to the plate with the coriander seeds.

Put the coriander, cumin, and peppercorns in a small spice grinder and finely grind. Transfer to a plate and set aside.



Chop off and discard the grassy tops of the lemongrass, leaving about 4 inches, including the rounded base and root end. Discard any dry or discolored outer leaves and trim off the root end to leave a smooth base just under the plump bulb. Slice crosswise into thin rounds and then chop coarsely; transfer to a medium bowl.

Drain the chiles well and add them to the bowl of chopped lemongrass along with the shallots, garlic, galangal, cilantro root, dried lime peel or lime zest, salt, and shrimp paste (if using). Add the ground spices and stir gently to combine.

Transfer to a food processor, add 1 or 2 Tbs. cold water, and process to an almost-smooth paste. If the paste hasn't come together, add more water, 1 Tbs. at a time. Scrape the paste into a jar, cover tightly, and refrigerate for up to 5 days, or freeze in 1- to 2-tablespoon-size portions for up to 1 month.

—Nancie McDermott

Green Curry Paste Variation

To make green curry paste, use ½ cup finely chopped unseeded fresh hot green chiles (such as Thai bird chiles or serranos), instead of the dried red chiles. (You won't need to soak them.)



How to decorate cookies with royal icing

A blend of egg whites and confectioners' sugar, royal icing hardens to a durable, rock-hard consistency when allowed to dry. Start by making a batch of icing (recipe, opposite) and then coloring it however you like. You can split the batch up and make lots of colors, or you can leave it white.



To outline a cookie

Spoon some of the icing into a pastry bag fitted with a very small plain tip and outline the rim of a cookie with the icing. (Practice first on a piece of cardboard or waxed paper. If the icing is too thick to pipe evenly, put it back in the bowl and stir in water, a drop or two at a time, until it pipes easily but still retains its shape.) Scatter sprinkles or sparkling sugar over the icing, if you like. Set the iced cookies aside to dry.



To coat an entire cookie with icing

Have ready a small clean artist's brush (one that you use only for food). If you want to use colors, set out a bowl for each color, portion the icing into the bowls, and stir drops of food coloring into each until the desired shade is reached. Outline the rim of a cookie with the icing as described at left and let harden slightly. Dampen the brush in water and spread a small amount of additional icing in an even layer within the cookie's border. Decorate the cookie with sprinkles, sparkling sugar, or edible dragées, if you like. Set the cookie aside to dry.

Once the icing is completely dry and hard, store the cookies in airtight containers at room temperature for two to three days or in the freezer for longer storage.

—Abby Dodge, contributing editor



Risk-free royal icing

Royal icing carries a very slight risk of salmonella infection from the raw egg whites used to make it. If you want to eliminate that risk completely, use pasteurized whites, which are available either dried or fresh. Look for **dried egg white powder** or **meringue powder** (dried egg white powder plus sugar and stabilizers) in the baking section of the market. You'll need to reconstitute the powder before making the icing, as described in the recipe below.

Fresh pasteurized egg whites are kept in the dairy case near the other eggs and egg products. Depending on your store, you may find cartons of whole in-shell pasteurized eggs (look closely at all the cartons because they're packaged just like regular eggs and are sometimes hard to notice), or you may find containers of liquid egg whites. Use fresh pasteurized egg whites just as you would use regular egg whites.

—Jennifer Armentrout, test kitchen manager

Royal Icing

Yields about 3 cups.

**2 Tbs. powdered egg whites or meringue powder
plus 6 Tbs. warm water
OR 3 large egg whites
16 oz. (4 cups)
confectioners' sugar
Food coloring (optional)**

If using the powdered egg whites or meringue powder and warm water, combine them in the bowl of a stand mixer or in a large mixing bowl. Let stand, whisking frequently, until the powder is dissolved, about 5 minutes. If using fresh egg whites, just put them in the bowl.

With the whisk attachment on a stand mixer or with a hand mixer, begin mixing on medium speed until frothy. Add the confectioners' sugar and continue beating until blended. Increase the speed to high and beat until the mixture is thick and shiny, about 3 minutes for fresh eggs and 5 minutes for powdered. Stir in food coloring (if using). Put a damp paper towel directly on the icing to keep a skin from forming. If not using within 2 hours, cover the bowl with plastic and refrigerate.

—Abby Dodge,
contributing editor ♦

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Baking: chocolate vs. cocoa powder

BY NICOLE REES

These days, it's easy to get your hands on amazing chocolate from all over the world—chocolate that, until recently, was considered way too good for baking. Now it's not unusual to use top-notch chocolate in everything from brownies to birthday cakes. True, it's always good to use the best ingredients you can find, but if you're thinking that excellent chocolate is the key to intensely flavored chocolate desserts, think again. When it comes to delivering deep, dark chocolate flavor, plain old cocoa powder is hard to beat.

Cocoa and chocolate: What's the difference?

Cocoa is by no means a lesser product than chocolate. On the contrary, it's a purer form of chocolate.

Chocolate has two main components—cocoa solids (where the flavor comes from) and cocoa butter (where the rich texture comes from). Cocoa powder has very little cocoa butter in it; it's mainly cocoa solids. In other words, you can think of cocoa powder as chocolate with most of its cocoa butter removed. Cocoa powder generally contains just 10 to 12% cocoa butter, while pure unsweetened chocolate contains about 55%.

So, ounce for ounce, cocoa powder packs a bigger punch of chocolate flavor, because you're getting more cocoa solids and less cocoa butter.

When to use cocoa and when to use chocolate

When I create a recipe for a chocolate dessert, flavor isn't the only attribute I consider—texture is also important.

The finished texture of a dessert is strongly influenced by the types of fat in the recipe, be it butter, oil, cocoa butter from chocolate, or a combination.

In creamy desserts, chocolate's usually best. Some desserts need the silkiness that only cocoa butter can provide. Cocoa butter is an unusual fat because it melts at a temperature very close to our body temperature. Chocolate that's hard and solid at room temperature feels rich on the tongue. In puddings, ganache, and mousses, the luxurious mouth-feel of cocoa butter really shines, so for these desserts, chocolate (yes, the best you can find) is almost always preferable to cocoa powder. That doesn't mean cocoa powder is a no-no for such recipes. In fact, adding a tablespoon or two to puddings or mousses along with the chocolate can boost the flavor without altering how the custard sets up.

In cakes, the choice is more complicated. Cakes made with cocoa and cakes made with chocolate can differ remarkably in flavor and texture. And those differences have a lot to do with the other fats used in the recipe.

Cakes made with cocoa powder and oil are tender and intensely flavored. Consider devil's food cake, for example. Its deep flavor, dark color, and moist texture come from pairing cocoa powder with oil. The flavor is intense because there's no milk or butter to dilute the pure chocolate flavor of the cocoa solids. (My favorite devil's food cake recipe calls for about a third as much cocoa as flour: $\frac{3}{4}$ cups unsweetened cocoa powder to every

Cocoa: Dutched or Natural?

Recipes that use cocoa often specify either natural or Dutch-process cocoa. Dutch-process cocoa has been treated with alkali, which increases the pH and mellows sharp flavors. You may find that Dutch-process cocoa tastes flat compared to natural cocoa, so it's important to use a good brand. It's best to keep both kinds of cocoa on hand for baking cakes, because the success of recipes that call for one or the other depends on the batter having a specific pH. If you have a strong preference for one type of cocoa, though, it's fine to substitute a portion of it into any recipe, even cakes.



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2½ cups flour.) And the texture is moist because vegetable oil is liquid at room temperature (and even when cool), unlike butter and cocoa butter, which are solid. You can serve devil's food cake refrigerator-cold, and it will still be exceptionally tender.

Chocolate cake made with chocolate, on the other hand, is temperature-sensitive. If you've ever been served a slice of cold chocolate cake that was dry and crumbly, it may well have been made with chocolate. Remember, cocoa butter is hard even at cool room temperature. The cake's flavor suffers, too, because the cocoa butter is what carries the chocolate flavor, and the colder it is, the longer it takes to melt on your tongue and release the flavor.

This is not to say that cakes made with chocolate are unpleasant; you just need to remember to serve them

at room temperature. And, the fact is, the cocoa butter can make for a pleasantly firm cake, especially if the recipe contains at least 4 ounces of unsweetened chocolate—think of a rich Bundt cake with a dense, springy crumb.

In brownies, cocoa yields chewy results, while chocolate gives a fudgy texture. Chocolate lovers can be snobby about brownies, but the fact is that cocoa powder makes for fabulously rich, chewy brownies. Brownies are chewy when they're high in sugar, fat, and eggs but low in flour. The last variable to their final texture is the nature of the fat used in the recipe—specifically how hard the fat is at the temperature the brownies are to be served. Butter is soft at room temperature, so brownies made with cocoa plus butter (or oil) have a noticeably soft, chewy texture. And the flavor is

intensely chocolatey with a wonderful lingering buttery flavor. By contrast, brownies made with chocolate plus butter are often firmer, almost fudgy, because cocoa butter is harder than butter at room temperature. The more chocolate the recipe contains, the fudgier the brownies will be.

A cake made with 4 ounces of unsweetened chocolate should pack the same flavor punch as a cake made with ¾ cup cocoa powder.

Compare hot cocoa and hot chocolate



Here's an easy way to experience the difference between cocoa and chocolate. The first recipe, at right, uses cocoa powder (with milk) and it's plenty chocolatey (front cup). The second recipe is made with chocolate. The cocoa butter makes it taste richer, but the chocolate flavor is more muted at first.

Classic Hot Cocoa

Yields 2⅔ cups; serves three or four.

This is the hot cocoa from my childhood, chocolatey but not rich enough to spoil dinner. I think mini marshmallows are essential, but you can skip them if you wish.

⅓ cup unsweetened natural cocoa powder
3 to 4 Tbs. granulated sugar
Pinch table salt
2½ cups whole milk
Mini marshmallows (optional), for garnish

Put the cocoa powder, sugar, and salt in a medium saucepan. Pour in ¼ cup of the milk and whisk constantly until the mixture is smooth and free of lumps. Pour in the remaining milk and whisk to combine. Set the pan over medium to medium-high heat. Cook, whisking frequently, until hot, 4 to 5 minutes. For best flavor, do not let the cocoa boil. Serve hot, topped with mini marshmallows, if you like.

Rich Hot Chocolate

Yields 3¼ cups; serves four.

This hot chocolate tastes rich enough to be dessert—forget the marshmallows. To vary the flavor, infuse the milk with orange zest or fresh mint leaves before adding the chocolate.

2½ cups whole milk
3 Tbs. granulated sugar
(chocolates vary in sugar level, so feel free to add another tablespoon if necessary)
Pinch table salt
3½ oz. bittersweet chocolate, finely chopped (about ¾ cup)

Put the milk, sugar, and salt in a medium saucepan set over medium-high heat. Cook, whisking frequently, until the sugar is melted, about 2 minutes. Continue to cook until the milk nearly reaches a boil, stirring occasionally, about 2 more minutes. Turn off the heat and add the chopped chocolate to the pan. Whisk constantly until the chocolate is melted and the mixture is smooth.

Frequent Fine Cooking contributor Nicole Rees is a food scientist and baker. ♦



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Crackers, p. 44

Dough scrapers (from \$6.99) and pizza cutters or pastry wheels (from \$2.90) for cutting the crackers are all available at CooksWares.com (800-915-9788). The site also sells rolling pins ranging in price from \$10.99 to \$49.99.

Potato Pancakes, p. 52

A slotted spatula, like a fish spatula with a curved lip, is the perfect tool for turning potato pancakes. Try one like Wüsthof's, \$29.95 at CutleryAndMore.com.

Gingerbread Desserts, p. 60

You'll need two 9-inch cake pans to make Julia Usher's Steamed Coriander-Gingerbread Cake; they're available at KingArthurFlour.com (800-827-6836) for \$12.95 apiece. The company also carries packages of forty-eight 9-inch parchment rounds (\$7.95). If you're looking for a 10x3-inch springform pan for the Ginger-Molasses Cheesecake, try Wilton's version, \$13.99 at CandylandCrafts.com (877-487-4289).

Thai Curries, p. 66

Visit TempleOfThai.com for dried lime peel and MyThaiMart.com for cilantro root. Both sites sell Thai chiles, Thai basil, and wild lime leaves (look for kaffir lime leaves) along with the ingredients you need to make curry paste from scratch, including fresh galangal, lemongrass, and shrimp paste. You can buy jarred curry paste, coconut milk, and fish sauce at these sites too, but they're also available at well-stocked supermarkets.

Holiday Cookies, p. 70

For a heavy-duty 9x13-inch baking pan for the double-decker bar cookies (\$21.95), visit KitchenConservatory.com (866-862-2433). Look for Silpat nonstick baking liners (\$19.95) and cooling racks (from \$15) at ChefsResource.com (866-765-2433). Grade B maple syrup is available at Whole Foods markets and Trader Joe's, or order it from Green Mountain Sugar House (gmsh.com; 800-643-9338) where prices

Wine, p. 36

Tim Gaiser recommends sipping sherry from a sherry glass. He likes Riedel's reasonably priced Overture sherry glasses made of lead-free crystal. A set of four is available at Amazon.com for \$31.68.

Marcona almonds are sold at Whole Foods markets and specialty stores. You can also find them online at Tienda.com (800-710-4304), where a 5-ounce jar is \$8.95; or buy them in larger quantities from TheSpanishTable.com (\$18.99 for 1.1 pounds).



start at \$27.95 per quart. The store also carries 1-pound bags of granulated maple sugar for \$8.95.

In Season, p. 22

For her leek tart, Ruth Lively calls for an 11-inch fluted tart pan with a removable bottom. Look for one at CooksDream.com (866-285-2665) where they sell for \$9.98.

From Our Test Kitchen, p. 78

For this issue, we bought liquid egg whites from Eggology.com (888-669-6557). The store locator will point you to a store in your area, or you can purchase in bulk directly from the site. For dried egg white powder (\$5.25 for 4 ounces) and meringue powder (\$5.50 for 8 ounces), visit KitchenKrafts.com (800-776-0575). The site also carries a wide range of cookie decorating supplies, such as sanding sugars, dragées, and food coloring, as well as cookie cutters and piping (pastry) bags.

For Thai ingredients like curry paste, galangal, lemongrass, and more, see the source under Thai Curries.

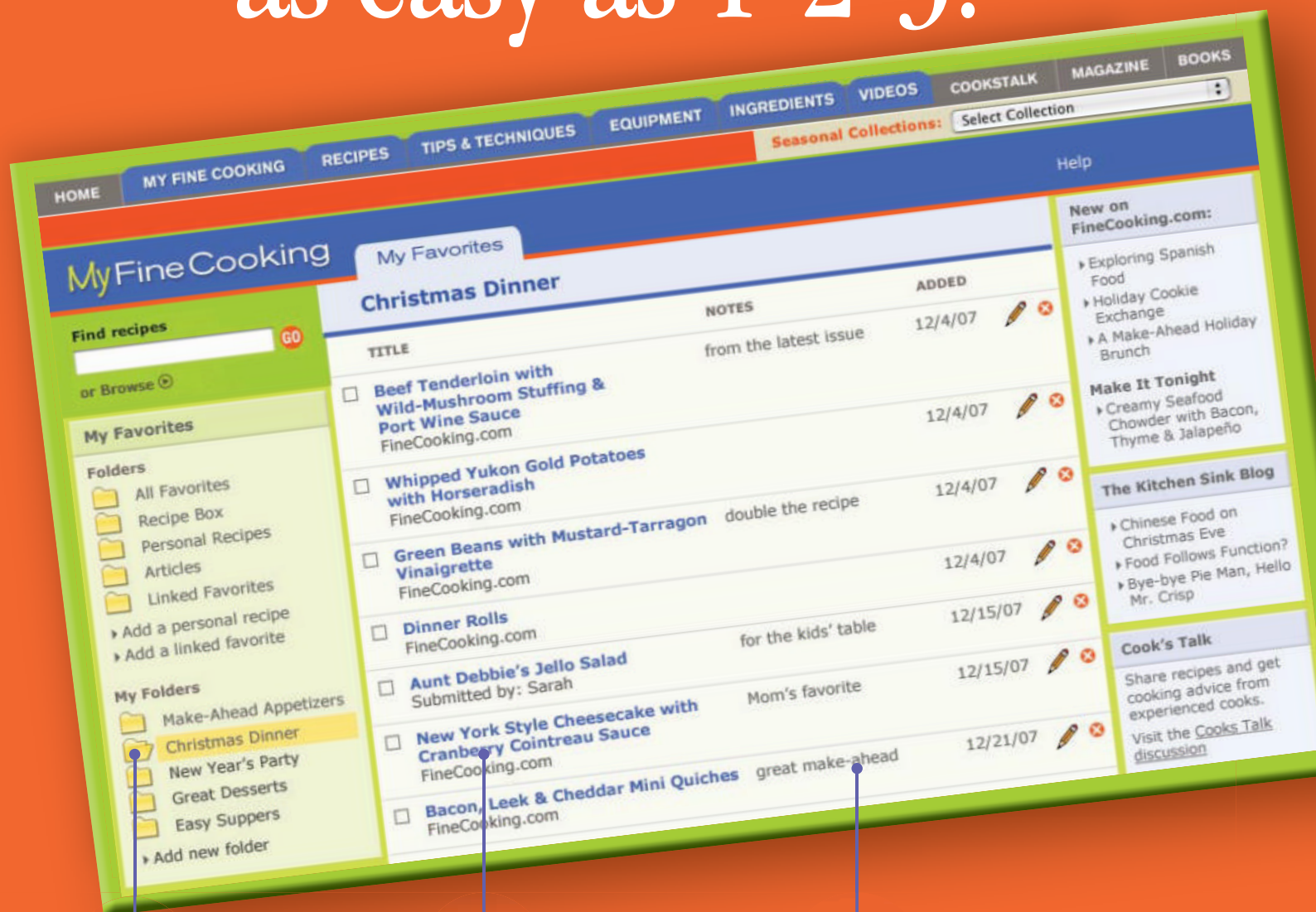
Breakfast Basics, p. 30a

Cooking.com (800-663-8810) sells several brands of 12-cup muffin pans, starting at \$11.95. To scoop muffin batter into the pans, try using two spoons or a #20 ice cream scoop with a "sweeper" that pushes the batter out. To find a similar scoop, go to Instaware.com (800-892-3622) and search for a #20 food disher (from \$6.86 to \$9.54).

If you're in the market for a new waffle maker, here are a few good options:

- ❖ Villaware's classic round waffle maker: It performs well and is compact (\$59.95 at Williams-Sonoma.com; 877-812-6235).
- ❖ The Waring restaurant-style Belgian waffle maker: A flip waffle that turns out light, crisp Belgian waffles (\$79.95 at SurLaTable.com; 800-243-0852).
- ❖ Chef's Choice Five-of-Hearts WafflePro: Yes, it's heart shaped, but it makes a very delicious, very crisp waffle very quickly (\$49 at ChefsCorner.com; 877-372-4535). ♦

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APPETIZERS

Bacon-Wrapped Stuffed Apricots, 86:39
Farmers' Market Crudités with Buttermilk Herb Dip, 86:26a
Gravlax, 86:66
Grilled Bruschetta with Rosemary-White Bean Purée & Heirloom Tomatoes, 86:26a
Grilled Goat Cheese Crostini with a Tangle of Marinated Roasted Peppers, 87:42
Leek Tart with Bacon & Gruyère, 89:23
Mini Tuna Burgers with Mint-Caper Aioli on Pita Triangles, 86:38
Pancetta & Pineapple Skewers, 86:38
Prosciutto-Wrapped Melon with Mint & White Balsamic Vinegar, 86:64
Roasted Red Pepper & Walnut Dip with Pomegranate Molasses, 85:75
Seeded Crackers, 89:45
Shrimp Skewers, 86:37
Smoky Eggplant & White Bean Dip with Pita Crisps, 83:82a
Tomato & Olive Pizzettas with Fennel Seeds & Aged Goat Cheese, 86:39
Wild Mushroom Toasts, 85:40

BEEF, VEAL & LAMB

Argentine Spice-Rubbed Flank Steak with Salsa Criolla, 86:26a
Asian-Style Beef Barbecue in Lettuce Packages, 84:78a
Beef Stew with Red Wine & Carrots, 84:39
Beef Tenderloin with Wild Mushroom Stuffing & Port Wine Sauce, 89:50
Braised Lamb Shanks with Garlic & Vermouth, 84:35
Broiled Lamb Skewers with Baby Arugula & Lemon Vinaigrette, 85:84a
Chili-Rubbed Rib-Eye Steak with Corn & Green Chile Ragoût, 87:78a
Fennel & Rosemary Beef Tenderloin with Creamy Mustard Sauce, 89:102a
Grilled Flank Steak with Sesame Sauce & Grilled Scallions, 87:53
Grilled Herb-Crusted Leg of Lamb with Fresh Mint Sauce, 86:26a
Lamb Chops with Lemon, Thyme & Mustard Butter, 84:78a
Lamb Shank & Sweet Pepper Ragù, 83:61
Middle Eastern Style Lamb Pita "Pizza," 84:68

Rack of Lamb with Ancho-Honey Glaze, 89:102a
Red Country-Style Curry with Beef, Shiitakes & Edamame, 89:67
Short Rib & Porcini Mushroom Ragù, 83:60
Spicy Beef with Peanuts & Chiles, 88:98a
Steak Adobo, 87:46
Steak, Egg & Blue Cheese Salad, 83:82a
Steak & Eggs Rancheros, 86:68
Steak with Red Onion, Wine & Port Sauce, 87:45
Steak with Three-Chile Sauce, 87:47
Stir-Fried Noodles with Beef & Vegetables, 88:98a

BEVERAGES

Classic Hot Cocoa, 89:88
Double-Chocolate Malted Milk Shake, 87:66
Rich Hot Chocolate, 89:88
Strawberry-Orange-Vanilla Breakfast Smoothie, 88:84



Grilled Garlic Bread, 87:41

BREADS & SANDWICHES

Apple-Butter Cinnamon Buns, 88:72
Blueberry Muffins, 89:30a
Caramelized Onion Biscuits, 85:50
Cheese Biscuits, 85:50
Cinnamon-Rhubarb Muffins, 85:63
Cream Shortcake Biscuits, 87:61
Farmers' Market Quesadillas, 87:78a
Fastest Cinnamon Buns, 88:72
Flaky Buttermilk Biscuits, 85:49
Fresh Herb Biscuits, 85:50
Grilled Garlic Bread, 87:41
Grilled Goat Cheese Crostini with a Tangle of Marinated Roasted Peppers, 87:42
Grilled Portabella Sandwiches with Tomatoes, Mozzarella & Basil, 86:78a
Quesadillas with Roasted Poblanos & Onions (Rajas), 86:21
Smoky Black Bean & Cheddar Burrito with Baby Spinach, 85:84a



Fastest Cinnamon Buns, 88:72

BREAKFAST

Apple-Butter Cinnamon Buns, 88:72
Basic Buttermilk Pancakes, 89:30a
Blueberry Muffins, 89:30a
Caramelized Onion Biscuits, 85:50
Cheese Biscuits, 85:50
Cinnamon-Rhubarb Muffins, 85:63
Classic Hot Cocoa, 89:88
Cream Shortcake Biscuits, 87:61
Crispy Sweet Pecan Granola, 89:30a
Fastest Cinnamon Buns, 88:72
Flaky Buttermilk Biscuits, 85:49
Fresh Herb Biscuits, 85:50
Honey-Almond Granola, 89:30a
Light, Crisp Waffles, 89:30a
Rich Hot Chocolate, 89:88
Strawberry-Orange-Vanilla Breakfast Smoothie, 88:84
Sweet Potato & Chile Hash with a Fried Egg, 89:30a

CHICKEN, DUCK & TURKEY

Buttermilk Country Fried Chicken with Cucumber Salad, 83:82a
Chicken with Vinegar & Onions, 84:37
Chinese Chicken Salad, 86:58
Chinese Five-Spice-Crusted Duck Breasts, 83:82a
Coconut Rice with Chicken & Snow Peas, 83:40
Crispy Cheddar & Jalapeño Coated Chicken Breasts, 84:51
Crispy Chicken Breasts with Lemon & Capers, 84:50
Crispy Orange-Sesame Chicken Breasts, 84:52
Green Curry with Chicken & Eggplant, 89:69
Grilled Five-Spice Chicken Thighs with Soy-Vinegar Sauce & Cilantro, 87:31
Grilled Rosemary Chicken Thighs with Sweet & Sour Orange Dipping Sauce, 87:32
Grilled Tandoori-Style Chicken Thighs, 87:33
Grilled Thai Chicken Breasts with Herb-Lemongrass Crust, 86:26a
Herb-Butter Roasted Turkey with Pinot Noir Gravy, 88:48
Herbed Chicken Breasts with a Crispy Black Olive & Parmigiano Crust, 84:52

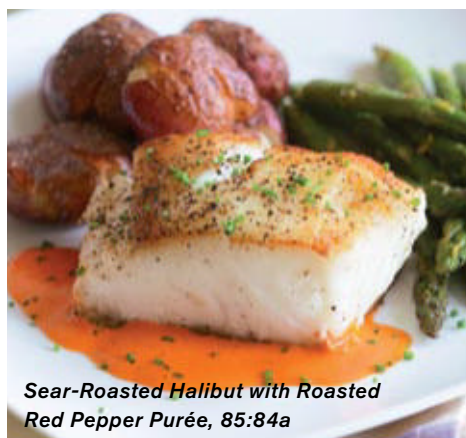
Indonesian Grilled Chicken Thighs with Mango-Peanut Salsa, 87:33
 Jerk Chicken Drumsticks, 84:78a
 Lemony Chicken Caesar Salad with Garlic-Parmesan Toasts, 83:42
 Lime Chicken with Poblano Sour Cream, 84:78a
 Orange Chicken with Scallions, 88:98a
 Roast Chicken with Rosemary-Lemon Salt, 83:39
 Roasted Chicken Legs with Lemon & Green Olives, 89:102a
 Roasted Chicken Thighs with Late-Summer Vegetables & Pan Sauce, 87:78a
 Roasted Cornish Game Hens with Wildflower Honey & Orange, 85:42
 Sesame Chicken with Ginger & Snow Peas, 88:98a
 Soft Chicken Tacos with the Works, 83:42
 Spicy Fried Chicken, 86:78a
 Spinach Salad with Chicken, Cashews, Ginger & Fried Wontons, 88:65
 Turkey & Sweet Potato Hash, 88:86



Steak & Eggs Rancheros, 86:68

EGGS

Egg Salad with Smoked Salmon, Capers & Dill, 86:78a
 Frittata with Asparagus, Herbs & Scallions, 83:62
 Frittata with Kale, Onions & Chorizo, 83:62
 Frittata with Mushrooms, Leeks & Goat Cheese, 83:62
 Frittata with Potatoes, Onions & Pancetta, 83:62
 Frittata with Sausage, Mushrooms & Onions, 83:62
 Garlic & Herb Fried Eggs on Toasts with Prosciutto Crisps, 85:84a
 Steak, Egg & Blue Cheese Salad, 83:82a
 Steak & Eggs Rancheros, 86:68
 Sweet Potato & Chile Hash with a Fried Egg, 89:30a



Sear-Roasted Halibut with Roasted Red Pepper Purée, 85:84a

FISH & SHELLFISH

Angel Hair Pasta with Sautéed Cherry Tomatoes, Lemon & Tuna, 87:78a
 Braised Cod with Fennel, Potatoes & Littlenecks, 84:61
 Braised Red Snapper Puttanesca, 84:59
 Colossal Shrimp with Watercress & Tomato Salad, 84:78a
 Curried Coconut Shrimp, 88:98a
 Gravlax, 86:66
 Grilled Corn, Shrimp & Chorizo Salad, 87:43
 Grilled Fish Steaks, 86:41
 Grilled Salmon Bundles with Saffron, Tomatoes & Olives, 86:78a
 Hot Garlicky Shrimp with Asparagus & Lemon, 85:59
 Linguine with Clam Sauce, 88:69
 Linguine with Shrimp & Chorizo, 83:82a
 Mini Tuna Burgers with Mint-Caper Aioli on Pita Triangles, 86:38
 Orange-Roasted Salmon with Yogurt-Caper Sauce, 89:102a
 Red Curry with Shrimp & Sugar Snap Peas, 89:68
 Roasted Cod with Lemon-Parsley Crumbs, 89:102a
 Salmon Braised in Pinot Noir, 84:60
 Sear-Roasted Halibut with Roasted Red Pepper Purée, 85:84a
 Seared Tuna with Fennel Seeds & Caper Brown Butter, 83:82a
 Shrimp Skewers, 86:37
 Shrimp with Fennel, Tomato & Pernod Sauce, 85:58
 Spicy Seared Chipotle Shrimp with Zucchini & Chorizo, 85:57
 Summer Bouillabaisse with Smoky Rouille, 87:78a
 Thai Seafood Salad, 87:57
 Tuna Teriyaki with Scallion Salad, 84:78a

LIGHT MAIN DISHES

Classic Potato Pancakes (Latkes), 89:53
 Corn Sauté with Canadian Bacon, Potatoes & Peppers, 87: back cover
 Farmers' Market Quesadillas, 87:78a
 Feta & Dill Galette with Lemony Spinach Salad, 87:78a

Garlic Crostini with Spinach, Mushroom & Parmigiano Salad, 88:66
 Leek Tart with Bacon & Gruyère, 89:23
 Potato Pancakes Stuffed with Duxelles, 89:54
 Seared Baby Bok Choy with Tofu & Shiitakes, 88:98a
 Spinach Salad with Apples, Dried Apricots & Pappadam Croutons, 88:66
 Spinach Salad with Chicken, Cashews, Ginger & Fried Wontons, 88:65
 Sweet Potato & Chile Hash with a Fried Egg, 89:30a
 Thai Seafood Salad, 87:57
 Warm French Lentil Salad with Smoked Sausage, 84:back cover
 Warm Spinach Salad with Eggs, Bacon & Croutons, 88:67

PASTA & PASTA SAUCES

Angel Hair Pasta with Sautéed Cherry Tomatoes, Lemon & Tuna, 87:78a
 Baked Fettucine with Asparagus, Lemon, Pine Nuts & Mascarpone, 84:26a
 Baked Rigatoni with Cauliflower in a Spicy Pink Sauce, 84:26a
 Baked Ziti with Tomato, Mozzarella & Sausage, 84:26a
 Campanelle with Broccoli Raab, Sausage & Olives, 84:26a
 Cavatappi with Roasted Peppers, Capocollo & Ricotta, 84:26a
 Classic Macaroni & Cheese, 84:26a
 Create-Your-Own Pasta Salad with Grilled Eggplant, 87:67
 Lamb Shank & Sweet Pepper Ragù, 83:61
 Linguine with Clam Sauce, 88:69
 Linguine with Shrimp & Chorizo, 83:82a
 Neapolitan Rib & Sausage Ragù, 83:59
 No-Cook Tomato Sauce, 87:39
 No-Cook Tomato Sauce with Basil Pesto, 87:39
 No-Cook Tomato Sauce with Cheese, 87:39
 No-Cook Tomato Sauce with Tapenade, 87:39
 Orecchiette with Caramelized Onions, Green Beans, Fresh Corn & Jalapeño, 86:45
 Orzo & Grilled Vegetable Salad with Feta, Olives & Oregano, 86:78a
 Pan-Fried Gnocchi with Bacon, Onions & Peas, 85:84a
 Penne with Asparagus, Olives & Parmigiano Breadcrumbs, 85:84a
 Rigatoni with Summer Squash, Spicy Sausage & Goat Cheese, 86:44
 Short Rib & Porcini Mushroom Ragù, 83:60
 Spaghetti with Portabellas, Sage & Walnuts, 84:26a
 Spaghetti with Spicy Shrimp, Cherry Tomatoes & Herbed Breadcrumbs, 86:44
 Warm Pasta Salad with Grilled Tomatoes, Zucchini & Pecorino, 86:26a

PORK & SAUSAGES

Crown Roast of Pork with Fennel-Apple Stuffing & Cider-Bourbon Sauce, 89:48
 Deviled Pork Chops, 84:78a
 Fried Ham with Redeye Gravy, 85:76
 Frittata with Kale, Onions & Chorizo, 83:62
 Frittata with Sausage, Mushrooms & Onions, 83:62
 Grilled Asian Pork Tenderloin with Peanut Sauce, 86:78a
 Grilled Corn, Shrimp & Chorizo Salad, 87:43
 Hoisin Pork with Napa Cabbage, 88:98a
 Linguine with Shrimp & Chorizo, 83:82a
 Neapolitan Rib & Sausage Ragù, 83:59
 Oven-Glazed Ham with Cherry-Pomegranate Glaze & Sauce, 85:47
 Oven-Glazed Ham with Maple, Tea & Cardamom Glaze & Sauce, 85:47
 Oven-Glazed Ham with Tangerine Marmalade Glaze & Sauce, 85:47
 Pork Lo Mein with Seared Scallions & Shiitakes, 87:54
 Pork Tenderloin with Sage & Marsala Sauce, 88:26
 Roasted Sausages & Grapes, 89:102a
 Spice-Crusted Roast Pork Tenderloin, 89:102a
 Warm French Lentil Salad with Smoked Sausage, 84:back cover

RICE & NOODLES

Arroz Verde (Green Rice), 89:10
 Coconut Rice with Chicken & Snow Peas, 83:40
 Rice Pilaf with Sage, Parmigiano & Prosciutto, 84:44
 Rice Pilaf with Spiced Caramelized Onions, Orange, Cherry & Pistachio, 84:42
 Saffron Rice Pilaf with Red Pepper & Toasted Almonds, 84:41
 Southwestern Rice Pilaf, 84:43
 Stir-Fried Noodles with Beef & Vegetables, 88:98a

SALADS

Arugula & Fennel Salad with Orange & Fennel Seed Dressing & Toasted Hazelnuts, 86:50
 Arugula Salad with Pears, Prosciutto & Aged Gouda, 87:78a
 Butter Lettuce with Poppy Seed & Tarragon Crème Fraîche Dressing, 86:48
 Carrot Salad with Walnut Oil & Honey, 85:54
 Chinese Chicken Salad, 86:58
 Chopped Tomato & Cucumber Salad with Mint & Feta, 86:26a
 Colossal Shrimp with Watercress & Tomato Salad, 84:78a
 Create-Your-Own Pasta Salad with Grilled Eggplant, 87:67
 Egg Salad with Smoked Salmon, Capers & Dill, 86:78a
 Feta & Dill Galette with Lemony Spinach Salad, 87:78a

Garden Lettuces with Garlic Chapons, 85:41
 Garlic Crostini with Spinach, Mushroom & Parmigiano Salad, 88:66
 Grilled Corn, Shrimp & Chorizo Salad, 87:43
 Grilled Southwestern Potato Salad, 86:26a
 Lemony Chicken Caesar Salad with Garlic-Parmesan Toasts, 83:42
 Mâche with Spicy Melon & Pink-Peppercorn Dressing, 86:51
 Mixed Green Salad with Red-Wine & Dijon Vinaigrette, 86:47
 Orzo & Grilled Vegetable Salad with Feta, Olives & Oregano, 86:78a
 Spinach Salad with Apples, Dried Apricots & Pappadam Croutons, 88:66
 Spinach Salad with Chicken, Cashews, Ginger & Fried Wontons, 88:65
 Steak, Egg & Blue Cheese Salad, 83:82a
 Thai Seafood Salad, 87:57
 Tuna Teriyaki with Scallion Salad, 84:78a
 Warm French Lentil Salad with Smoked Sausage, 84:back cover
 Warm Pasta Salad with Grilled Tomatoes, Zucchini & Pecorino, 86:26a
 Warm Spinach Salad with Eggs, Bacon & Croutons, 88:67

SEASONINGS, CONDIMENTS, DRESSINGS & SAUCES

Baby Carrots Pickled in Champagne & Sherry Vinegars, 85:54
 Basic Vinaigrette, 87:67
 Caramelized Shallot Butter, 88:57
 Cranberry Sauce with Vanilla, Maple Syrup & Cassis, 88:52
 Duxelles, 89:54
 Eggnog Crème Anglaise, 89:63
 Garam Masala, 83:70
 Garlic-Cumin Vinaigrette with Feta & Herbs, 87:51
 Ginger-Lemon-Soy Splash, 88:57
 Green Curry Paste, 89:83
 Homemade Crema (Mexican Sour Cream), 84:70
 Honey-Mustard Sherry Vinaigrette, 83:72
 Lemon, Dill & Cucumber Sauce, 86:42
 Moroccan-Style Spice Rub, 88:56
 Olive, Orange & Anchovy Vinaigrette, 87:50
 Pickled Cauliflower with Carrots & Red Bell Pepper, 87:64
 Pimentón Vinaigrette, 86:37
 Red Curry Paste, 89:83
 Rhubarb & Dried-Cherry Chutney, 85:11
 Roasted Red Pepper Relish with Pine Nuts, Currants & Marjoram, 87:51
 Rosemary-Thyme-Lemon Oil, 88:56
 Sea Salt, Chile & Lime Butter, 86:42
 Sesame Salt, 88:57
 Spiced Pickled Beets, 87:65
 Sun-Dried Tomato, Olive & Caper Relish, 86:42

Tarragon-Scented Mayonnaise with Cornichons & Capers, 86:42
 Three-Herb Butter, 88:47
 Toasted Breadcrumbs, 84:48
 Toasted-Breadcrumb Salsa Verde, 87:50
 Toasted Garlic & Coriander Oil, 88:57



Browned Cauliflower with Anchovies, Olives & Capers, 83:21

SIDE DISHES

Basic Roasted Vegetables, 88:54
 Braised Bok Choy with Sherry & Prosciutto, 84:54
 Broccoli with Eggs & Lemony Parmesan Breadcrumbs, 88:51
 Browned Cauliflower with Anchovies, Olives & Capers, 83:21
 Brussels Sprouts Braised with Pancetta, Shallot, Thyme & Lemon, 89:59
 Cabbage & Carrot Stir-Fry with Toasted Cumin & Lime, 83:47
 Carrot Salad with Walnut Oil & Honey, 85:54
 Chopped Tomato & Cucumber Salad with Mint & Feta, 86:26a
 Classic Mashed Potatoes, 88:52
 Classic Potato Pancakes (Latkes), 89:53
 Corn & Mushroom Sauté with Leeks & Pancetta, 87:37
 Corn Sauté with Canadian Bacon, Potatoes & Peppers, 87:back cover
 Corn Sauté with Ginger, Garlic & Fresh Cilantro, 87:37
 Corn, Sweet Onion & Zucchini Sauté with Fresh Mint, 87:36
 Create-Your-Own Pasta Salad with Grilled Eggplant, 87:67
 Crispy Smashed Roasted Potatoes, 83:45
 Green Bean Stir-Fry with Shredded Coconut, 83:49
 Grilled Asparagus & Onions with Balsamic Vinegar & Blue Cheese, 86:26a
 Grilled Corn on the Cob with Thyme & Roasted Red Pepper Butter, 86:26a
 Grilled Eggplant, 87:49
 Grilled Eggplant with Garlic-Cumin Vinaigrette with Feta & Herbs, 87:51
 Grilled Eggplant with Olive, Orange & Anchovy Vinaigrette, 87:50

Grilled Eggplant with Roasted Red Pepper Relish with Pine Nuts, Currants & Marjoram, 87:51

Grilled Eggplant with Toasted-Breadcrumb Salsa Verde, 87:50

Grilled Southwestern Potato Salad, 86:26a

Ham Bone Collards, 85:76

Maple Pan-Roasted Baby Carrots, 85:53

Mushroom Stir-Fry with Onions & Tomatoes, 83:48

New Potatoes with Butter, Shallots & Chervil, 85:42

Orzo & Grilled Vegetable Salad with Feta, Olives & Oregano, 86:78a

Pan-Seared Artichokes with Sherry Vinegar & Thyme, 85:19

Potato Pancakes Stuffed With Duxelles, 89:54

Potato Stir-Fry with Mint & Cilantro, 83:49

Rice Pilaf with Sage, Parmigiano & Prosciutto, 84:44

Rice Pilaf with Spiced Caramelized Onions, Orange, Cherry & Pistachio, 84:42

Roasted Asparagus with Lemon & Olive Oil, 85:42

Roasted Brussels Sprouts with Dijon, Walnuts & Crisp Crumbs, 89:57

Roasted Eggplant with Chiles, Peanuts & Mint, 84:55

Roasted Parsnips with Cinnamon & Coriander, 84:19

Saffron Rice Pilaf with Red Pepper & Toasted Almonds, 84:41

Sausage-Maple Bread Stuffing, 88:50

Sautéed Shredded Brussels Sprouts with Fresh Herbs & Crisp Shallots, 89:58

Southwestern Rice Pilaf, 84:43

Stir-Fried Cauliflower with Green Peas & Ginger, 83:back cover

Stir-Fried Napa Cabbage with Garlic, Fresh Chile & Basil, 84:56

Stir-Fried Snow Peas with Shiitakes & Ginger, 84:57

Sweet Potato Gratin with Caramelized Onions, 88:50

Warm French Lentil Salad with Smoked Sausage, 84:back cover

Warm Pasta Salad with Grilled Tomatoes, Zucchini & Pecorino, 86:26a

SOUPS, STEWS, & STOCKS

Cabbage and White Bean Soup, 88:74

Curried Lentil Soup, 83:82a

French Farmers' Soup, 88:74

Ginger Chicken Soup, 85:84a

Green Gazpacho, 87:19

Mexican Black Bean Soup, 88:74

Middle-Eastern Chickpea Soup, 88:74

Minestrone, 88:74

Summer Bouillabaisse with Smoky Rouille, 87:78a

Summer Corn Chowder with Scallions, Bacon & Potatoes, 87:55

Tomatillo Gazpacho, 86:78a

Turkey Broth, 88:47

Tuscan Peasant Soup with Rosemary & Pancetta, 83:10

Velvety Carrot Soup with Ginger, 85:55



Classic Crème Brûlée, 84:46



Chocolate Espresso Pecan Pie, 88:62



Balsamic-Macerated Strawberries with Basil, 86:back cover

Desserts & Pastry

Cakes

Bourbon-Glazed Brown Sugar Pecan Pound Cake, 88:62

Brandy & Rum Glazed Pound Cake, 83:68

Butter Pound Cake, 83:67

Chocolate Chip Pound Cake, 83:69

Ginger-Molasses Cheesecake, 89:65

Lemon-Coconut Pound Cake, 83:69

Pecan Pineapple Upside-Down Cake, 88:60

Steamed Coriander-Gingerbread Cake with Eggnog Crème Anglaise, 89:62

Cookies & Squares

Bourbon Balls, 89:80

Cardamom-Honey Cutouts, 89:72

Dark Chocolate Crackles, 89:71

Fried Chocolate-Hazelnut Wontons with Orange Dipping Sauce, 84:65

Ginger-Spiced Slice & Bake Cookies, 89:74

Lemon Cheesecake Squares, 86:53

Macadamia Double-Decker Brownie Bars, 89:75

Maple-Walnut Tuiles, 89:76

Peanut Butter & Chocolate Sandwiches, 89:77

Rugelach, 89:73

Vanilla Slice & Bake Cookies, 89:74

Crisps, Crumbles & Cobblers

Apple Crisp with Pecans & Orange, 88:61

Gingerbread-Pear Cobbler, 89:61

Plum Cobbler with Almonds, Lemon Zest & Ginger, 86:61

Raspberry-Peach Cobbler with Cornmeal Biscuits, 86:61

Rhubarb Brown Sugar Crumble, 85:63

Triple Berry Cobbler with Pecans & Cinnamon, 86:61

Custards, Mousses & Ice Cream

Bourbon-Chocolate Mousse, 85:back cover

Classic Crème Brûlée, 84:46

Ginger-Spice Ice Cream, 89:64

Phyllo "Chips" with Vanilla Ice Cream & Strawberry Mash "Dip," 84:63

Vanilla Ice Cream with Espresso-Caramel Sauce, 85:43

Fruit Desserts

Balsamic-Macerated Strawberries with Basil, 86:back cover

Marinated Peaches, 87:59

Peaches & Cream Dessert, 87:59

Peaches & Cream Parfait, 87:60

Peaches & Cream Shortcakes, 87:61

Pies & Tarts

Apple Brown-Butter Jalousie, 83:56

Chocolate Espresso Pecan Pie, 88:62

Free-Form Pear Tarts with Almond & Cinnamon, 84:64

Mixed-Berry Jalousie, 83:56

Strawberry-Rhubarb Pie, 85:62

Fillings, Compotes & Icings

Honey Whipped Cream, 87:59

Lemon Curd, 86:53

Royal Icing, 89:85

Strawberry-Rhubarb Compote with Vanilla & Cardamom, 85:61 ♦

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Recipe	Page	Calories		Protein	Carb	Fats (g)				Chol.	Sodium	Fiber	Notes
		total	from fat	(g)	(g)	total	sat	mono	poly	(mg)	(mg)	(g)	
Letters	10												
Arroz Verde (Green Rice)		210	70	4	30	8	4	3	1	15	320	1	based on 8 servings
In Season	22												
Leek Tart with Bacon & Gruyère		270	170	7	20	19	11	5	1	85	200	1	based on 12 servings
Breakfast Basics	30a												
Light, Crisp Waffles		290	160	5	25	18	3	4	10	45	380	1	per waffle
Honey-Almond Granola		290	150	8	30	17	1.5	9	6	0	90	4	per ½ cup
Crispy Sweet Pecan Granola		230	110	4	29	12	1	7	3.5	0	65	4	per ½ cup
Sweet Potato & Chile Hash w/ a Fried Egg		430	300	9	28	33	6	16	10	225	970	4	based on 6 servings
Buttermilk Pancakes		140	35	5	21	4	2	1	0.5	40	260	1	per pancake
Blueberry Muffins		410	170	7	54	19	12	5	1	95	320	1	per muffin
Crackers	44												
Seeded Crackers		30	10	1	4	1	0	1	0	0	75	0	per cracker
Rosemary & Sea Salt Crackers		30	10	1	4	1	0	0.5	0	0	90	0	per cracker
Roasts	46												
Crown Roast of Pork w/ Fennel-Apple Stuffing		580	200	42	34	22	9	9	2	105	880	4	based on 14 servings
Beef Tenderloin w/ Wild Mushroom Stuffing		530	210	41	16	24	9	9	2	140	640	1	based on 10 servings
Potato Pancakes	52												
Classic Potato Pancakes (Latkes)		130	80	1	12	9	1.5	2.5	5	10	170	1	based on 20 servings
Potato Pancakes Stuffed w/ Duxelles		160	100	2	13	12	2.5	3	5	15	210	1	based on 10 servings
Brussels Sprouts	56												
Roasted Brussels Sprouts w/ Brown Butter & Lemon		170	130	4	10	15	6	7	1	20	170	4	based on 6 servings
Brussels Sprouts Braised w/ Pancetta, Shallot & Thyme		140	80	7	12	8	3	4	1	15	460	4	based on 8 servings
Roasted Brussels Sprouts w/ Dijon & Walnuts		200	130	5	14	15	2.5	7	4.5	5	270	5	based on 8 servings
Sautéed Shredded Brussels Sprouts w/ Crisp Shallots		140	80	5	14	9	2	3.5	3	5	270	4	based on 6 servings
Gingerbread Desserts	60												
Coriander-Gingerbread Cake w/ Crème Anglaise		430	180	6	57	20	11	5	3	125	380	2	based on 20 servings
Eggnog Crème Anglaise		60	50	1	3	5	3	1.5	0	40	15	0	per 1 Tbs.
Gingerbread-Pear Cobbler		340	110	4	57	12	4.5	4	2	35	170	5	based on 16 servings
Ginger-Molasses Cheesecake		390	240	7	33	26	16	8	1.5	145	290	0	based on 20 servings
Ginger Spice Ice Cream		310	180	4	28	20	12	6	1	170	80	0	based on 8 servings
Thai Curries	66												
Green Curry w/ Chicken & Eggplant		480	350	25	13	39	23	7	5	75	980	3	w/o rice or noodles
Red Curry w/ Shrimp & Sugar Snap Peas		430	280	24	18	31	21	4.5	4	170	1240	4	w/o rice or noodles
Red Country-Style Curry w/ Beef, Shiitakes & Edamame		350	160	33	15	18	4.5	7	3.5	45	1370	3	w/o rice or noodles
Cookies	70												
Dark Chocolate Crackles		110	45	2	16	5	3	1.5	0	20	45	1	per cookie
Vanilla Slice & Bake Cookies		50	20	1	6	2.5	1.5	0.5	0	10	15	0	per cookie
Ginger-Spiced Slice & Bake Cookies		50	20	1	8	2.5	1.5	0.5	0	10	15	0	per cookie
Macadamia Double-Decker Brownie Bars		130	70	1	16	8	3	3.5	0	25	35	1	per bar
Maple-Walnut Tuiles		50	20	1	8	2	1	0.5	0	5	20	0	per cookie
Cardamom-Honey Cutouts		50	25	1	7	2.5	1.5	0.5	0	10	20	0	per cookie
Peanut Butter & Chocolate Sandwiches		250	150	7	21	17	6	7	3	20	160	2	per sandwich cookie
Rugelach		100	60	1	9	7	4	2	0	20	50	0	per cookie
Test Kitchen	78												
Bourbon Balls		110	70	2	9	8	3	3.5	1	10	30	2	per bourbon ball
Red Curry Paste		10	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	75	1	per 1 Tbs.
Green Curry Paste		10	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	70	0	per 1 Tbs.
Royal Icing		40	0	0	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	per 1 Tbs.
Food Science	86												
Classic Hot Cocoa		140	50	6	20	6	3.5	1.5	0	15	135	2	based on 4 servings
Rich Hot Chocolate		260	110	7	31	12	8	4	0	15	85	3	based on 4 servings
Quick & Delicious	102a												
Roasted Sausages & Grapes		340	170	14	31	19	7	8	2.5	40	1100	2	based on 6 servings
Roasted Chicken Legs w/ Lemon & Green Olives		440	260	40	3	29	7	14	6	140	500	1	based on 6 servings
Fennel & Rosemary Beef Tenderloin w/ Mustard Sauce		310	170	30	2	19	8	8	1	100	300	0	based on 8 servings
Rack of Lamb w/ Ancho-Honey Glaze		420	230	28	19	25	11	11	2	110	370	1	based on 6 servings
Orange-Roasted Salmon w/ Yogurt-Caper Sauce		340	160	40	2	18	3	8	5	110	300	0	based on 6 servings
Roasted Cod w/ Lemon-Parsley Crumbs		210	60	28	7	7	4	1.5	0.5	80	410	0	based on 6 servings
Spice-Crusted Roast Pork Tenderloin		330	110	47	5	12	3.5	6	1.5	125	300	1	based on 6 servings

The nutritional analyses have been calculated by a registered dietitian at Nutritional Solutions in Melville, New York. When a recipe gives a choice of ingredients, the first choice is the one used. Optional

ingredients with measured amounts are included; ingredients without specific quantities are not. When a range of ingredient amounts or servings is given, the smaller amount or portion is used. When the

quantities of salt and pepper aren't specified, the analysis is based on ¼ teaspoon salt and ⅛ teaspoon pepper per serving for entrées, and ⅛ teaspoon salt and ⅛ teaspoon pepper per serving for side dishes.

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Yield - 6 servings

Center: 1/2 bar (2 oz) 60% Cacao Bittersweet Chocolate Baking Bar

1/4 cup heavy cream

Cake: Nonstick cooking spray

1 bar (4 oz) 60% Cacao Bittersweet Chocolate Baking Bar

8 Tbsp. (1 stick) unsalted butter

2 whole eggs

2 egg yolks

1/3 cup sugar

1/2 tsp. vanilla extract

1/4 cup cake flour

Raspberries and whipped cream for garnish

To make centers, melt chocolate and cream in double boiler. Whisk gently to blend. Refrigerate about 2 hours or until firm. Form into 6 balls; refrigerate until needed.

To make cake, heat oven to 400°F. Spray six 4-ounce ramekins or custard cups with cooking spray. Melt chocolate and butter in double boiler; whisk gently to blend. With an electric mixer, whisk eggs, yolks, sugar, and vanilla on high speed about 5 minutes or until thick and light. Fold melted chocolate mixture and flour into egg mixture just until combined. Spoon cake batter into ramekins. Place a chocolate ball in the middle of each ramekin.

Bake about 15 minutes or until cake is firm to the touch. Let it sit out of the oven for about 5 minutes. Run a small, sharp knife around inside of each ramekin, place a plate on top, invert and remove ramekin. Garnish with raspberries and a dollop of whipped cream.



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48



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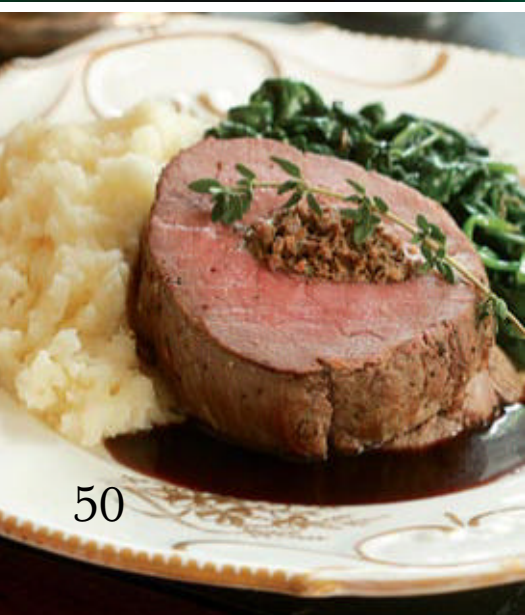
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54



102a



50



88



73

COMPILED BY JOANNE SMART

Breakfast Basics

There's never been a better time than right now to perfect your pancakes and finesse your fried egg flip. That's because, given the season, there's a good chance a special-occasion breakfast is in order, one that calls for dusting off the waffle maker or greasing muffin tins. In this special pullout, you'll find not only delicious recipes from past issues of *Fine Cooking* but also helpful tips to ensure the best results. Happy holidays.

What's inside:

- ❖ How to make the lightest, crispiest waffles ever
- ❖ Easy fried eggs, plus a great hash
- ❖ Perfect pancakes every time
- ❖ How to make magnificent muffins
- ❖ Granola, sweet & crunchy

Honey-Almond Granola

Yields 9 to 10 cups.

The larger clumps of this honey-sweet version are easily eaten out of hand.

Cooking spray
4 cups old-fashioned (not quick-cooking)
rolled oats
1 cup oat bran
2 cups whole almonds, coarsely chopped
1 cup nonfat dry milk powder
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup vegetable oil
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup honey
1 Tbs. pure vanilla extract
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. pure almond extract
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. table salt
1 cup raisins (optional)

Position racks in the upper and lower thirds of the oven and heat the oven to 325°F. Spray two rimmed baking sheets with cooking spray. In a large bowl, mix the oats, oat bran, and almonds. In a smaller bowl, whisk the dry milk powder, oil, honey, vanilla, almond extract, and salt. Pour the mixture (it will be gloppy) over the oats and stir, with your hands or a spoon, until well combined.

Divide the mixture between the two oiled baking sheets and spread in an even layer. Bake for 20 minutes, stir the granola, and switch the positions of the pans. Bake until the oats are golden brown and the almonds look well toasted, another 10 to 20 minutes; don't overcook. The oats may feel soft but will crisp as they cool. Let cool completely in the pans. When completely cool, stir in the raisins, if using.

—Robin Asbell

Crispy Sweet Pecan Granola

Yields 4 to 5 cups.

The looser texture of this granola makes it perfect for sprinkling over a bowl of yogurt.

Cooking spray
3 cups old-fashioned (not quick-cooking)
rolled oats
1 cup pecan halves, roughly chopped
2 tsp. ground cinnamon
 $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. table salt
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup packed light brown sugar
2 Tbs. canola oil
1 Tbs. pure vanilla extract

Position racks in the upper and lower thirds of the oven and heat the oven to 300°F. Spray two rimmed baking sheets with cooking spray. In a large bowl, mix the oats, pecans, cinnamon, and salt. In a small saucepan, combine the brown sugar and $\frac{1}{4}$ cup water. Bring to a simmer over medium heat, stirring until the sugar is melted. Stir in the oil and vanilla. Remove from the heat and pour over the oat mixture. Stir with a spoon until well mixed.

Divide the mixture between the two oiled baking sheets and spread in an even layer. Bake for 15 minutes, stir the granola, and switch the positions of the pans. Bake until the oats are golden brown and the nuts look well toasted, another 10 to 15 minutes. The oats may feel soft but will crisp as they cool. Let cool completely in the pans.

—Robin Asbell

Tips for great granola

- ❖ Spread the granola in a single layer on the baking sheet for even toasting.
- ❖ Don't bake granola in a hot oven until completely crisp, or it will taste burned. It should come out a little soft and will firm as it cools.
- ❖ For added crispness in the honey granola, turn off the oven, leave the door ajar, and let the granola cool in the oven.
- ❖ Store cooled granola in an airtight container; it will keep for at least three weeks.



Sweet Potato & Chile Hash with a Fried Egg

Serves six.

The adobo sauce found in a can of chipotle chiles in adobo (available in most supermarkets) gives the hash's mayonnaise garnish a spicy-smoky flavor. You can also flavor it with a medium-hot, not-too-chunky salsa.

FOR THE CHILE MAYONNAISE:

½ cup mayonnaise
3 Tbs. adobo sauce or salsa
1 Tbs. fresh lime juice
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

FOR THE HASH:

1 lb. sweet potatoes, peeled and cut into ½-inch cubes (3½ to 4 cups)
6 Tbs. olive oil; more as needed
1 small onion, diced (about 1 cup)
2 small fresh poblano or 4 Anaheim chiles (or other medium-hot chiles), diced (about ¾ cup)
One-half red bell pepper, diced (about ½ cup)
2 Tbs. finely chopped garlic
1 to 2 jalapeños, finely chopped
2 Tbs. chopped fresh cilantro
1 Tbs. fresh lime juice
2 tsp. chopped fresh oregano
2 tsp. kosher salt; more to taste
Freshly ground black pepper
6 eggs
6 sprigs fresh cilantro

Make the chile mayonnaise: In a bowl, combine the mayonnaise, adobo sauce or salsa, and lime juice. Season with a little salt and pepper. Whisk until

smooth. Taste and adjust the seasonings; set aside.

Make the hash: Cook the diced sweet potatoes in boiling salted water until firm-tender, about 3 minutes. Drain well and set aside.

In a large nonstick skillet, heat 3 Tbs. of the oil over medium heat. Cook the onion, chiles, and bell pepper, stirring frequently, until all are well softened and the onion is golden brown, about 20 minutes. Stir in the garlic and jalapeño and cook for 1 minute. Transfer to a plate.

Return the skillet to the stove, and heat the remaining 3 Tbs. oil over medium-high heat. Add the sweet potatoes and cook, tossing frequently, until the edges begin to brown, adjusting the heat as necessary, about 10 minutes. Return the onion and pepper mixture to the pan and cook until warmed through. Stir in the cilantro, lime juice, oregano, and salt; season with pepper to taste. Transfer to a warmed plate or bowl; cover and keep warm.

Add more oil to the pan if needed. When the oil is hot, fry the eggs in batches, as directed at right. You can serve them sunny side up or over easy, but the yolks should still be runny.

Divide the hash among six plates, top each portion with a fried egg, a dollop of the chile mayo, and a cilantro sprig. Serve at once.

—Karen & Ben Barker

Easy fried eggs

A fried egg makes a great topper for any hash, including the southwestern-style hash at left. Fried eggs are easier to cook if not crowded in the pan; if you're frying a lot, keep them warm by undercooking them slightly and holding them on an oiled baking sheet in a 200°F oven.



Sunny side up

Crack an egg into a cup. Heat about 2 tsp. butter or oil in a small nonstick skillet over medium heat. When the fat is hot, slip in the egg, season it with salt and pepper, and turn the heat to medium low or low. Cook until done to your liking, 1 to 2 minutes, basting the egg white with the fat to help it set.



Over easy

Begin cooking as you would for sunny-side-up eggs but rather than basting the egg, flip it gently with a spatula after the first side has set and continue to cook for another minute or until done to your liking.

pancakes



Basic Buttermilk Pancakes

Yields twelve 4-inch pancakes.

Buttermilk gives these pancakes their light texture and slightly tangy flavor. If you don't have any on hand, you can substitute 2 to 2¼ cups whole milk instead. You'll get the best results if all of your ingredients are close to room temperature.

10 oz. (2¼ cups) unbleached all-purpose flour
4 tsp. granulated sugar
1½ tsp. baking powder
½ tsp. baking soda
½ tsp. table salt
2½ cups buttermilk
2 large eggs
1 oz. (2 Tbs.) butter, melted
Vegetable oil for the pan or griddle

In a large bowl, whisk together the flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda, and salt. In a medium bowl, whisk together the buttermilk, eggs, and melted butter.

Pour the wet ingredients into the dry ingredients. With as few strokes as possible, mix just until the batter is evenly moistened but still a little lumpy. Let the batter rest for at least 5 minutes, during which time it should smooth out.

Very lightly oil a griddle and heat it over medium heat until the droplets from a sprinkle of water dance briefly before disappearing. Drop about 2 Tbs. of batter onto the griddle. Use the spoon to gently spread this fairly thick batter. Be sure to leave space between the pancakes for flipping. Cook the pancakes until they're covered in bubbles on top and nicely browned on the bottom. Flip and cook the other side until the bottom is nicely browned and the center of the pancake feels firm when poked.

Pancakes are best made to order; if you must, you can keep them warm spread on a baking sheet lined with a kitchen towel in a 200°F oven.

—Kathleen Stewart

Perfect pancakes every time

The ideal time to flip a pancake is after bubbles cover the surface but before they all pop. Once flipped, the second side should cook for about half as long as the first.



Pour the batter from the tip of a spoon to get a nice round shape. Thick batter may need some spreading.



Before flipping, take a peek to be sure they're nicely browned on the bottom; that color means lots of flavor.

muffins



Blueberry Muffins

Yields 12 muffins.

This muffin batter is also delicious with the flavoring variations that follow the recipe. Be sure to add the fruit before the batter is fully mixed to avoid overmixing.

Vegetable oil or cooking spray for the pan
1 lb. (3½ cups) unbleached all-purpose flour

4 tsp. baking powder

½ tsp. baking soda

½ tsp. table salt

1½ cups granulated sugar

5 oz. (10 Tbs.) unsalted butter, melted and cooled slightly

1 cup whole milk, at room temperature

1 cup crème fraîche or sour cream, at room temperature

2 large eggs, at room temperature

1 large egg yolk, at room temperature

2 tsp. finely grated lemon zest

1½ cups fresh (washed, dried, and picked over) or frozen (no need to thaw) blueberries

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Lightly oil (or spray with cooking spray) the top of a standard 12-cup muffin tin and then line with paper or foil baking cups. (Spraying the pan keeps the muffin tops from sticking to the pan's surface.)



Overfilling the muffin cups gives you those great big bakery-style muffin tops.

In a large bowl, sift together the flour, baking powder, baking soda, and salt; mix well. In a medium bowl, whisk the sugar, butter, milk, crème fraîche or sour cream, eggs, egg yolk, and zest until well combined.

Pour the wet ingredients into the dry and fold gently with a rubber spatula just until the dry ingredients are mostly moistened; the batter will be lumpy, and there should still be quite a few streaks of dry flour. Sprinkle the blueberries on the bat-

ter and fold them in until just combined. (The batter will still be lumpy; don't try to smooth it out or you'll overmix.)

If you have an ice cream scoop with a "sweeper" in it, use it to fill the muffin cups. Otherwise, use two spoons to spoon the batter in, distributing all of the batter evenly. The batter should mound higher than the rim of the cups by about ¾ inch.

Bake until the muffins are golden brown and spring back lightly when you press the middle, 30 to 35 minutes. (The muffin tops will probably meld together.) Let the muffin tin cool on a rack for 15 to 20 minutes. Use a table knife to separate the tops, and then invert the pan and pop out the muffins.

—Joanne Chang

VARIATIONS:

Cranberry-Orange Muffins

In place of the lemon zest and blueberries in the batter, add orange zest and chopped fresh cranberries.

Banana-Walnut Muffins

Don't add any zest to the batter. Instead add 1½ cups thinly sliced ripe banana and ¾ cup coarsely chopped toasted walnuts.

waffles



Light, Crisp Waffles

Yields four or five 8-inch waffles.

A required rest in the oven not only adds to the crispiness of the waffles but also allows you to make a big batch, so everyone can eat at once.

3½ oz. (¾ cup) bleached all-purpose flour
1 oz. (¼ cup) cornstarch
½ tsp. table salt
½ tsp. baking powder
¼ tsp. baking soda
¾ cup buttermilk
¼ cup milk
6 Tbs. vegetable oil
1 large egg, separated
1 Tbs. granulated sugar
½ tsp. pure vanilla extract

Heat the oven to 200°F and heat the waffle iron. Mix the flour, cornstarch, salt, baking powder, and baking soda in a medium bowl. Measure the buttermilk, milk, and vegetable oil in a Pyrex measuring cup; mix in the egg yolk and set aside.

In another bowl, beat the egg white almost to soft peaks. Sprinkle in the sugar and continue to beat until the peaks are firm and glossy. Beat in the vanilla.

Pour the buttermilk mixture into the dry ingredients and whisk until just mixed. Drop the whipped egg

white onto the batter in dollops and fold in with a rubber spatula until just incorporated.

Pour the batter onto the hot waffle iron (½ to ⅔ cup depending on your waffle iron) and cook until the waffle is crisp and nutty brown (follow the manufacturer's instructions for timing at first and then adjust to your liking). Set the waffle directly on the oven rack to keep it warm and crisp. Repeat with the remaining batter, holding the waffles in the oven (don't stack them). When all the waffles are cooked, serve immediately.

—Pam Anderson

VARIATIONS:

Chocolate Chip Waffles

Stir ½ cup coarsely chopped chocolate chips (or ½ cup mini chocolate chips) into the batter.

Cornmeal Waffles

Substitute ½ cup cornmeal for ½ cup of the flour (keep the cornstarch).

Cranberry-Orange Waffles

Stir ½ cup coarsely chopped dried cranberries and 2 tsp. finely grated orange zest into the batter.

Whole-Grain Waffles

Add ¼ cup wheat germ to the dry ingredients.

The best batter for crispy waffles



As for most waffle batters, the wet ingredients are mixed quickly with the dry.



Then whipped egg whites are folded in to make the batter—and the waffles—ultralight.

Waffle-iron tips

- ❖ Grease your waffle iron (even a nonstick one) the first few times you use it. Use vegetable shortening and a pastry brush or cooking spray.
- ❖ Use wooden or rubber utensils—not metal—to preserve the integrity of nonstick surfaces.
- ❖ Start with about ½ cup batter for the smallest irons and ⅔ cup for bigger ones; increase as necessary to fill out waffles.
- ❖ Don't open the waffle iron prematurely; if your iron doesn't have a beeper or light, watch the steam; it will decrease as the waffle cooks.
- ❖ The very first waffle is usually a throwaway; adjust the amount of batter and the iron's settings until you get the results you like.

Quick Prep, Easy Roast

BY MOLLY STEVENS

Even the most enthusiastic cook occasionally balks at the prospect of preparing an elaborate holiday meal. When this happens to me, I respond by firing up the oven for any one of these lively and reliable roasts. Roasting is easy on the cook, because it requires only a minimal amount of time and toil to assemble and season, and then the oven concentrates the flavors. The roasting time depends entirely on the size and shape of whatever you're cooking. For instance, the Fennel & Rosemary Beef Tenderloin cooks for 40 to 50 minutes, while the Orange-Roasted Salmon is ready in less than 20 minutes. Either way, roasting leaves you free to make a salad, set the table, or to just relax and enjoy the appetizing aromas filling your kitchen. Each of these recipes serves at least six, making them ideal for effortless yet elegant entertaining, or for a Sunday night supper that leaves you with delicious leftovers for a weekday meal.



Fennel & Rosemary Beef Tenderloin with Creamy Mustard Sauce

Serves six to eight.

1 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
1 Tbs. finely chopped fresh rosemary
1½ tsp. ground fennel seed
1 tsp. kosher salt; more to taste
½ tsp. freshly cracked black pepper
2½- to 3-lb. beef tenderloin roast, excess fat trimmed
½ cup crème fraîche
2 Tbs. Dijon mustard
2 tsp. fresh lemon juice

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 375°F.

In a small bowl, combine the olive oil, rosemary, fennel seed, salt, and pepper. Stir to make a paste. Pat the beef dry with paper towels and rub the paste all over the surface of the meat. If necessary, tie the roast at 1½-inch intervals. (The roast can be seasoned and refrigerated up to 4 hours in advance.)

Put the roast on a rack on a small, rimmed baking sheet or in a shallow roasting pan. Roast until an instant-read thermometer inserted in the center reads 120°F for rare, 125° to 130°F for medium rare, or 135°F for medium, 40 to 50 minutes.

Meanwhile, in a small bowl, whisk together the crème fraîche, mustard, and lemon juice. Season lightly with salt to taste.

Transfer the roast to a carving board (preferably with a well for collecting juices) and let it rest, uncovered, for 10 to 15 minutes before carving it into ⅓- to ½-inch-thick slices. Serve the beef, passing the mustard sauce at the table (it is also excellent cold, spread on leftover roast beef sandwiches).



Roasted Chicken Legs with Lemon & Green Olives

Serves six.

- 6 chicken leg quarters**
(drumsticks and thighs connected; 4 to 5 lb.)
- 3 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil;**
more as needed
- 1 tsp. dried thyme**
- 1 tsp. kosher salt**
- ¼ tsp. crushed red pepper flakes**
- 1 small lemon, scrubbed,**
halved lengthwise, seeded,
and sliced into ⅛-inch-thick
half moons (discard the ends)
- Heaping ½ cup unpitted**
green olives, preferably
picholine or lucques

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 450°F.

If portions of the backbone are still attached to the chicken quarters, cut them off and discard. Pat the chicken dry with paper towels. In a small bowl, combine the olive oil, thyme, salt, and red pepper flakes. Using your fingers, rub all of the seasoned oil over all the chicken pieces, carefully separating the skin from the meat and rubbing the oil under the skin as well. Arrange the legs skin side up (not overlapping) on a heavy-duty rimmed baking sheet. Roast the chicken for 20 minutes.

Meanwhile, put the lemon slices and olives in a small bowl. When the chicken has roasted for 20 minutes, take the pan out of the oven and spoon a little of the fat from the pan over the lemons and olives (or use a little fresh olive oil). Scatter the lemons and olives on the baking sheet around but not on top of the chicken, trying to keep the lemon slices away from the edge of the pan where they might burn.

Continue to roast until the chicken juices run clear when pierced with a knife and an instant-read thermometer inserted in a thigh registers 170°F, another 20 to 25 minutes. Transfer the chicken, olives, and lemon slices to a platter and serve.

Note: Be sure to tell your guests that the olives have pits, and encourage them to eat the roasted lemon slices, rind and all. They add a nice sour-bitter counterpoint to the rich chicken meat. If Meyer lemons are in season, by all means use them here.



Roasted Sausages & Grapes

Serves six.

- 1¾ to 2 lb. hot or sweet Italian sausage links**
(or a combination)
- 2 lb. seedless red grapes,**
stemmed
- 2 Tbs. sherry vinegar**
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- ¼ cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley**

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 425°F.

Cut the sausages in half on a sharp angle and arrange them on a large rimmed baking sheet or in a shallow roasting pan. Add the grapes to the pan. Sprinkle the vinegar over the sausages and grapes, season with salt and a generous amount of black pepper, and toss so that everything is evenly seasoned.

Roast, turning with a spatula after 15 minutes, until the sausages are browned and

cooked through (cut into one to check), 35 to 40 minutes total. Scatter the parsley over the top, stir to mingle all the juices, being careful not to crush the grapes, and serve.

Serving suggestion:

A side dish of creamy polenta or risotto is just right to balance the sweetness of the roasted grapes and the richness of the sausages.

Tip: I like to use a mix of hot and sweet sausages for a more interesting dish. The result depends a lot on the quality of the sausages.



Orange-Roasted Salmon with Yogurt-Caper Sauce

Serves six.

2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil; more for the baking sheet
Six 1-inch-thick, skin-on center-cut salmon fillets (about 6 oz. each), pin bones removed
1½ tsp. finely grated orange zest
¾ tsp. kosher salt; more to taste
Freshly ground black pepper
¾ cup plain whole-milk yogurt
2 Tbs. finely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
1½ Tbs. capers, drained, rinsed, and chopped
1 Tbs. fresh orange juice

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 400°F. Lightly oil a heavy-duty rimmed baking sheet.

Arrange the salmon skin side down on the baking

sheet, drizzle with 1 Tbs. of the olive oil, and sprinkle with 1 tsp. of the orange zest, the salt, and a few grinds of black pepper. Gently rub the seasonings into the fish. Let sit at room temperature while the oven heats.

Combine the yogurt in a small bowl with the remaining 1 Tbs. of olive oil, ½ tsp. orange zest, and the parsley, capers, and orange juice. Stir to combine. Season to taste with salt and black pepper. The sauce can be made up to several hours ahead and kept refrigerated.

Roast the salmon until just cooked through, with a trace of bright pink in the center (cut into a piece to check), 10 to 15 minutes. Serve immediately, drizzled with the yogurt sauce.



Rack of Lamb with Ancho-Honey Glaze

Serves six.

2 racks of lamb (each 1¼ to 1½ lb. with 7 to 8 ribs), trimmed, or frenched
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
⅓ cup honey
2 Tbs. red-wine vinegar
1½ tsp. ground cumin, preferably toasted
1 tsp. ancho chile powder
½ cup orange juice
1 clove garlic, minced
1 Tbs. finely chopped mint, parsley, basil, or cilantro (optional)

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 425°F. Line a small roasting pan or rimmed baking sheet with foil (to make it easier to clean the glaze from the pan).

If necessary, trim the lamb so that only a thin layer of fat remains, being careful not to remove all the fat. Arrange the lamb bone side down in the roasting pan, interlocking the bone ends if necessary to make them fit. Season each rack generously with salt and pepper.

In a small bowl, combine the honey, vinegar, cumin, ancho chile powder, and a pinch each of salt and pepper. Brush the surface of the meat with about half (¼ cup) of the glaze.

Roast, brushing the lamb after 10 minutes and then again every 5 minutes with the glaze that has begun to caramelize on the roasting pan, until an instant-read thermometer inserted close to but not touching the bones reads 125°F for rare or 130° to 135°F for medium rare, about 20 minutes for rare and 25 minutes for medium rare.

Meanwhile, pour the remaining glaze into a small saucepan, add the orange juice and garlic, and bring to a simmer over medium-high heat. Simmer until reduced to a slightly syrupy glaze, about 7 minutes. Add the herbs, if using.

Let the lamb rest for about 5 minutes. Cut between the bones to carve the racks into chops and drizzle each chop with a little of the glaze before serving.

Serving suggestion:

Honey-spiced lamb is a traditional Moroccan festival meal. This simplified version makes the most of the way sweet honey balances the richness of the lamb. Serve herb-flecked couscous or rice pilaf alongside.



Spice-Crusted Roast Pork Tenderloin

Serves six.

**4 tsp. extra-virgin olive oil;
more as needed for the
baking sheet**

**¼ cup plain low-fat or
whole-milk yogurt**

1 tsp. Dijon mustard

2 cloves garlic, minced

¾ tsp. kosher salt

**Fresh coarsely ground black
pepper**

**Two 1½-lb. pork tenderloins,
trimmed**

**¾ cup fresh breadcrumbs
(from a baguette or other
white artisan-style bread)**

1½ tsp. mustard seeds

1½ tsp. coriander seeds

1½ tsp. cumin seeds

1½ tsp. sesame seeds

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 450°F. Lightly oil a heavy-duty rimmed baking sheet.

In a small bowl, stir together 2 tsp. of the olive oil and the yogurt, mustard, garlic, salt, and several grinds of pepper. Spread this mixture over the entire surface of the tenderloins with your hands or a rubber spatula. (The pork can be slathered with the yogurt mixture and refrigerated for up to 4 hours ahead.)

In a shallow baking dish, combine the breadcrumbs and the mustard, coriander, cumin, and sesame seeds.

Roll the tenderloins in the breadcrumb mixture, patting so that the crumbs and spices adhere to the meat. Put the tenderloins on the baking sheet, gather up any remaining crumbs and spices, and pat them onto the top of the pork. Drizzle the remaining 2 tsp. olive oil over the top.

Roast the tenderloins for 10 minutes and then lower the oven temperature to 325°F. Continue roasting until an instant-read thermometer inserted in the center of each tenderloin reads 140°F, 25 to 30 minutes longer. Transfer the pork to a carving board and let it rest for 10 minutes before carving it into ½-inch-thick slices. Be sure to serve all the crumb coating that falls off during carving.

Serving suggestion:

The rather lean pork tenderloins deserve something a bit rich and creamy alongside, such as risotto, buttery mashed potatoes, a creamy gratin, or puréed winter squash. I sometimes like to serve this with a little tangy chutney on the side, too.



Roasted Cod with Lemon-Parsley Crumbs

Serves six.

1 cup panko breadcrumbs

3 Tbs. melted unsalted butter

**3 Tbs. finely chopped fresh
flat-leaf parsley**

**2 tsp. finely grated lemon
zest**

**Kosher salt and freshly
ground black pepper**

**Six 1- to 1½-inch-thick cod
fillets (about 6 oz. each)**

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 425°F.

In a medium bowl, combine the panko, butter, parsley, and lemon zest. Add a pinch of salt and a grind of pepper and stir to evenly distribute the ingredients.

Line a heavy-duty rimmed baking sheet with parchment. Arrange the cod fillets on the baking sheet and season all over with salt and pepper.

Divide the panko topping among the fillets, pressing lightly so it adheres. Roast until the breadcrumbs are browned and the fish is mostly opaque (just cooked through), with a trace of translucence in the center (cut into a piece to check), 10 to 12 minutes, depending on the thickness of the fillets. Serve immediately.

Tip: If you get thinner tail pieces of cod, you might want to fold them over to double the thickness so they don't cook too quickly and dry out.

Molly Stevens is a contributing editor and the author of All About Braising, a winner of the James Beard Foundation award for best single-subject cookbook. ♦